KARTINI

The Complete Writings 1898–1904

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY JOOST COTÉ

MONASH
University

Kartini

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MONASH University
Publishing

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Online PDF edition published 2021.

Monash University Publishing

Matheson Library and Information Services Building
40 Exhibition Walk
Monash University
Clayton, Victoria 3800, Australia
https://publishing.monash.edu/

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https://publishing.monash.edu/product/kartini/

Design: Les Thomas. Cover image: Natsuko Akagawa.

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Author: Kartini, Raden Adjeng, 1879–1904, author.
Title: Kartini : The complete writings 1898–1904 / Joost Coté.
ISBN: 9781922235107 (paperback)
ISBN: 9781922235114 (pdf)
Notes: Includes bibliographical references and index.
Subjects: Kartini, Raden Adjeng, 1879-1904; Feminists--Indonesia.; Women--Indonesia--Java; Java (Indonesia)--Social life and customs.
Other Authors/Contributors: Coté, Joost J. P, editor and translator.
Dewey Number: 305.42095982

This publication and translation project is supported by the Commonwealth through the Australia-Indonesia Institute of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade..

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In Indonesia, the legacy of Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904) is celebrated on Kartini Day, 21 April, every year. Around the world Kartini is recognised as a major figure in the history of the advancement of women, a tireless and effective advocate of women's education and emancipation. However, this is the first complete and unexpurgated collection of Kartini's published articles, memoranda and correspondence ever published in any language.

This collection reveals Kartini's importance as a pioneer of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Claiming in her letters and petitions her people's right to national autonomy well before her male compatriots did so publicly, Kartini used her writing in an attempt to educate the Netherlands and Dutch colonialists about Java and the aspirations of its people. Had she lived longer, she would have been one of Indonesia's leading pre-independence writers as well as an educationalist. In 1964 she was elevated to the status of national hero by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. She has become one of the most well known Asian figures in the international women's movement.

The product of several decades' study and based on archival sources, this book is extensively annotated and provided with an authoritative historical introduction by one of the world's leading Kartini authorities. This work will be the essential resource for scholars and students of Kartini and her place in Indonesian history, around the world, for many years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Joost Coté is Senior Research Fellow in the Department of History at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He has researched and published widely on early 20th century colonial modernity in the Netherlands East Indies and has written about Kartini over several decades. He has previously published three translated and annotated collections of correspondence by Kartini and her sisters.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the course of the quarter century that I have been reading, and writing on, Raden Ajeng Kartini I have been encouraged by many friends in Indonesia, the Netherlands and Australia who I thank here for helping bring this project to conclusion. In particular, though, I would like to thank the staff of the KITLV archive on Reuvensplaats where the Kartini archive is housed. My thanks also to the Australia-Indonesia Institute for its financial support for this volume, and to the members of the Monash Asia Series Editorial Board for seeing the value of this project. I am grateful to Roy Jordaan, Pieter Post, Alle Hoekema and Auguste Buijn for their willingness to locate and provide me with some important new detail for elucidating Kartini's history. Finally I would like to thank the Rembang Heritage Society for bringing the Lasem batik used on the cover to my attention and Natsuko Akagawa for suggesting its use in the design for the cover and providing the photograph.

My hope is that the book that has resulted will contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the person and ideals of Raden Ajeng Kartini.

This publication and translation project is supported by the Commonwealth through the Australia-Indonesia Institute of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Note on the batik displayed on the cover

The batik featured on the cover is handcrafted in Lasem, a coastal town not far from Rembang where Kartini lies buried. The batik makers of Lasem are long famous for producing this particular form of bright, Chinese-influenced, Pasisir style batik. Evidently admired by Kartini and her European friend Rosa Abendanon, the newly married Raden Ayu writes to Rosa soon after arriving in Rembang: 'We are also looking for real Lasem sarongs' (16 December 1903).

INTRODUCTION

About this translation

Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904) is a central figure in twentieth century Indonesian history and is a name familiar to every Indonesian school child. She is remembered each year in newspaper articles and speeches across the country on Kartini Day, 21 April (her birthday), as the pioneer advocate of women's education. Continued access to selections of her correspondence, written in impeccable Dutch over the short period of her adult life between 1899 and 1904 and now translated into many languages, have enabled each generation of readers around the world to connect anew with her passionate advocacy of women's education and Javanese emancipation. Yet, surprisingly, despite having been a figure much admired in her homeland and internationally for a century, a complete collection of her writing in a single volume has not previously been attempted.

There have been two primary (Dutch language) published sources for her correspondence: *Door Duisternis tot Licht: Gedachten over and voor het Javaansche Volk* (DDTL) (Through darkness to light: Thoughts about and for the Javanese People) first published in 1911, and *Kartini: Brieven* (Kartini: Letters) published in 1987. The first, prepared by Jacques Abendanon, a former director of Native Education in the Dutch East Indies whose wife appears to have been the main recipient of Kartini's writing, consists of a collection of 95 edited letters (or letter extracts) written by Kartini to ten recipients between 1899 and 1904. The second consists of all extant unexpurgated correspondence by Kartini and her younger sisters written between 1900 and 1904 to Mr and Mrs Abendanon. The publication followed the release of this archive by the Abendanon family in 1986 (Jaquet 1987). It added a further 46 new letters and complete versions of 48 other letters written to Rosa and Jacques Abendanon which had previously appeared in DDTL only in an expurgated version. Although these two collections partially overlap and are now both available in their original Dutch and in Indonesian and English translations, they have continued to exist as two separate collections of Kartini's writings.[1]

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[1] All original letters, publication details and related correspondence and documents form part of the Abendanon Archive, H897, housed in the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), Leiden. I wish to acknowledge the generous assistance provided over the years by the staff of this important institution.

A key aim of this project, then, has been to finally integrate these two collections and where possible, to restore original editorial deletions made for the 1911 publication to create a significantly richer and more informative resource for understanding Kartini

In addition, drawing on the Kartini archive housed in the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), Leiden, the volume makes available for the first time all her known published writing. As such, the second aim of this publication is to provide readers with the first complete collection of the writing of Raden Ajeng Kartini in English, or indeed in any other language. This will provide an international readership with a more rounded and complex portrait of this significant historical figure. It is hoped it will also provide readers with an interest in Indonesian women's history, modern Indonesian history, and the history of the international women's movement with an authoritative resource for understanding the complexity of what may be described as an early expression of cultural nationalism in Indonesian.

This volume reproduces in English translation 141 complete and partial letters, originally written in Dutch and directed to ten European recipients. Further, it includes eleven pieces of extended writing, which were either published or circulated amongst a small group of readers during her lifetime. This writing consists of four published short stories, two published ethnographic articles (one published posthumously), two memoranda written at the behest of and directed to Dutch and colonial government officials, and three extended descriptive accounts extracted from her correspondence and apparently written as self-contained prose pieces for private circulation. Of these, only the memorandum, 'Give the Javanese education' and the descriptive accounts as included in the published correspondence have been previously generally available.

Over the course of the century since the original publication of DDTL Kartini's correspondence has been subject to the intervention of editors, translators and publishers who have all added layers of meanings and imputed intentions – colonial, feminist, nationalist – that readers have now come to identify as embedded in the correspondence. Translations of the already carefully selected and abridged 1911 publication – including into Indonesian, Javanese and Sundanese as well as French, Russian, Japanese – have further reduced the amount of text available to their respective readers. The best-known Indonesian version, for instance, *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (originally published in 1938), which continues to be regularly reissued, omitted 21 letters from the original 95 letter extracts contained in DDTL. The

English version (first edition 1920) and regularly reprinted since, excluded 29 of the original letters. This latter version has always carried the dubious title of '*Letters of a Javanese Princess*', even though, in one of the earliest letters in the volume, Kartini specifically requests her correspondent, Stella Zeehandelaar, not to refer to her as nobility but to 'Just call me Kartini'.[2] Translation has also added a further distortion: Anglophone readers have unknowingly been subjected to a 1920 translation by Louise Symmers that, in places, is so 'free' as to be misleading. Implications in the Indonesian translation may have similarly inflected the carefully worded sentiments of the original.[3] Both these popular translated versions, as indicated above, also do not include the corpus of unedited letters first made public in 1987.[4]

But as well as an extensive private correspondence, Kartini also produced a corpus of writing, which she intended for a public readership during her lifetime. This has been absent from considerations of the 'historical Kartini'. Although not of significant literary merit, these reiterate in a different form the same ideas and concerns she conveyed privately in correspondence. They thus provide an important added dimension to an appreciation of the persona, the ideas and the goals of Raden Ajeng Kartini. Several pieces are attempts at writing popular literature; some were published, some remained in 'raw form' embedded in correspondence. Two other pieces are carefully written as ethnographic studies, and two as carefully constructed memoranda with a distinct agenda and readership in mind. Read together with the correspondence as a single corpus of writing, their inclusion allows the reader to better appreciate also the possible future Kartini had hoped to realize and the intellectual process which formulated that vision.

As important as providing as complete a collection of Kartini's writing as possible in enabling the reader to appreciate 'what Kartini said' is an awareness of the historical political, social, cultural and intellectual context in which Kartini wrote and to which she was responding. The aim of the extended introduction to Kartini's writing that follows, and the extensive annotations to the text, is to provide some insight into this complex background by, in particular, providing an account of her European interlocutors and the specific historical and intellectual context and content of her writing. To this end, also,

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2 In his introduction to the fourth edition of DDTL Abendanon expressed his annoyance at the use of this title in the then recently published English translation of his volume.

3 Although this writer is not in a position to evaluate the nuances that an Indonesian translation may have introduced, like the English translations, it represents a further process of selection and expurgation of the original.

4 *Kartini: Brieven* subsequently appeared in Indonesian translation in 1989 (Sulastin 1989) and in English in 1992 (Coté 1992).

a complete listing of the books referenced by Kartini in her letters, many of which she owned, is provided in a final chapter.

Together, then, the aim of this volume is to enrich an appreciation of this historical figure writing, to use Nagazumi's phrase, 'at the dawn of Indonesian nationalism' (Nagazumi 1972). Ultimately the justification for this project lies in the conviction that this correspondence and associated prose writing is of importance not only for what it tells us about a Javanese woman named Kartini, but also for the insight it provides concerning this significant moment in colonial and Indonesian history.

An appreciation of 'the historical Kartini' necessitates drawing an important distinction between the period 1899 and 1904, that is, the time the writing was undertaken, and c.1908 and 1911, that is, the period in which her writing was originally collected, selected and edited.[5] While Rosa Manuela Abendanon, née Mandri, the main recipient of the extant correspondence and who appears to have been influential in encouraging Kartini to express her aspirations, may have initiated the plan to publish Kartini's letters, the 1911 publication was arranged by the former colonial Director of Native Education, Religion and Industry in the Dutch East Indies, Jacques Henri Abendanon. There is no question that Abendanon's aim was to convey the message that Kartini herself had tried to communicate, but an understanding of the 'historical subject', and a proper appreciation of the emotions and motivations that led to the writing, require a return to the historical setting of *the moment of writing*. Clarifying that setting will be the subject of the introduction.

In the meantime it is important to keep in mind what the 1911 publication did and did not include. This volume cannot claim to be the 'complete Kartini' in a literal sense. This is because, firstly, *Door Duisternis tot Licht* included only Kartini's letters to a select group of European recipients whom Abendanon was able to contact or who were prepared to provide them. Upon receipt, as the archive shows, these letters were further carefully edited to ensure, as Abendanon admitted, that they would not offend living colonial and Javanese public figures, Islamic belief or the intimacy of Kartini's private friendships' and edited to more clearly present 'her thoughts'.[6] Secondly, scattered references in the extant correspondence make it sufficiently clear that Kartini had written many more letters to many more people than represented in DDTL. Thirdly, as several letters explicitly confirm, Kartini was in contact with male members

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5 Archival correspondence related to the publication suggests a lengthy process of accumulating surviving correspondence and negotiation with publishers.

6 The nature of this editorial intrusion is revealed in the archived drafts of DDTL. Where these deletions remain legible they have been restored in this text.

of a new generation of young Western educated Javanese who appeared to have shared many of her ideals. Thus, although what is absent from the Kartini record must obviously remain a matter of conjecture, awareness of this (probable) *absence* is important in attempting to understand 'the historical Kartini'.

Finally, although this volume – and indeed most discussions of the subject – focuses on Kartini, she herself makes clear that the formulation of the ideas presented in the correspondence occurred in collaboration with her slightly younger sisters, Roekmini (b. 1880) and Kardinah (b. 1881). They in fact were the ones who carried on with this shared enterprise after Kartini's death, as their subsequent correspondence reveals (Coté 2008). They provided Kartini with the essential support. Had things turned out differently, Roekmini would have joined Kartini in undertaking further studies. Kartini, however, clearly outshone her sisters in the advocacy of their shared ideals, in her penmanship, her passion, and her ambition.

Sources

This translation is based on a number of sources. The letters to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri are a revised version of the text of my *Letters of Kartini* (Coté 1992), originally a translation based on *Kartini: Brieven* (Jaquet 1987). The letters to Stella Zeehandelaar are a revised version of the text of my *On Feminism and Nationalism* (Coté 2005a), originally based on letters to Stella included in *Door Duisternis tot Licht* supplemented by reference to the original archival material. For the translation of the remaining letters from *Door Duisternis tot Licht* I have used the fourth (1923) edition. In undertaking these revised and new translations, I have consulted the Abendanon Archive (KITLV Archive No. 13, H987), which includes the files of the original *Door Duisternis tot Licht* publications and the archive of letters donated by the Abendanon family to the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Where possible, I have used the archive to restore deletions shown to have been originally made for the 1911 publication. My translations of Kartini's two memoranda, published short stories and ethnographic descriptions have used either copies included in the Kartini archive or photocopies of original publications. In addition, the volume includes new translations of extracts of letters first located and published as an appendix to the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* edited by Elisabeth Allard, and extracts of letters included in H Bouman, *Meer Licht over Kartini* (1954) and Marie Ovink-Soer, 'In memoriam' (1926). These minor extracts have been inserted in the chronological arrangement of the correspondence and identified by a footnote.

I am also responsible for translations of all quotations from other Dutch sources.

Spelling and format

In this translation from the Dutch, original spelling of place names has been changed to conform to current Indonesian spelling but original colonial names of places – e.g. Batavia – and forms of address – Mijnheer, Mevrouw, Oom – have been retained. Colonial-era spelling of personal names and colonial-era and Dutch titles have also been retained – thus Regent not Bupati. Indonesian words originally used in the correspondence have not been italicized as these commonly formed part of a colonial Dutch language but have been listed in the glossary. English words which appeared in English in the original have been identified with a footnote. All Indonesian, Dutch and Javanese words are included in an extensive glossary. Presentation of the writing as it appeared in the original in terms of punctuation and paragraphing has been significantly altered in the course of translation, to present a more acceptable (modern) look, and to avoid possible confusion on the part of the reader. This unfortunately has meant that some of the physical signs the original letter writer employed to give emphasis – multiple separate paragraphs, segments of sentences, emphatic and repeated punctuation – have been lost. However, wherever possible underlining of words and phrases in the original correspondence that was added for emphasis has been reproduced in the translation.

Kartini's extended family

1. Parents and siblings:

RMAA Samingun Sosroningrat (?–1905)	Regent of Jepara 1880–1905
RA Moerjam (m. 1875)	Ibu Ngasirah (m. 1872)
RA Soelastri (1877–?)	RM Slamet Sosroningrat (1873–?)
RA Roekmini (1880–1951)	RM Sosro Boesono (1874–?)
RA Kartinah (1883–?)	RMP Sosrokartono (1877–1951)
	RA Kartini (1879–1904)
	RA Kardinah (1881–1971)
	RM Sosro Moelijono (1885–?)
	RA Soematri (1888–1963)
	RM Sosrorawito (1892–?)

2. Father's generation:

RMAA Prawoto Condronegoro V	Regent of Kudus 1856–1879 Regent of Brebes 1879–1885
RMAA Trenggono Purbningrat	Regent of Demak 1866–1881 Regent of Semarang 1881–1883
RMAA Hadiningrat	Regent of Demak 1881–1915

3. Grandfather's generation:

Condronegoro II:	Regent of Pati 1808–1812 Regent of Kudus 18?
Condronegoro III:	Regent of Pati 1812–1830 Regent of Kudus 1830–1835
Condronegoro IV:	Regent of Kudus 1835–1856 Regent of Demak 1856–1866

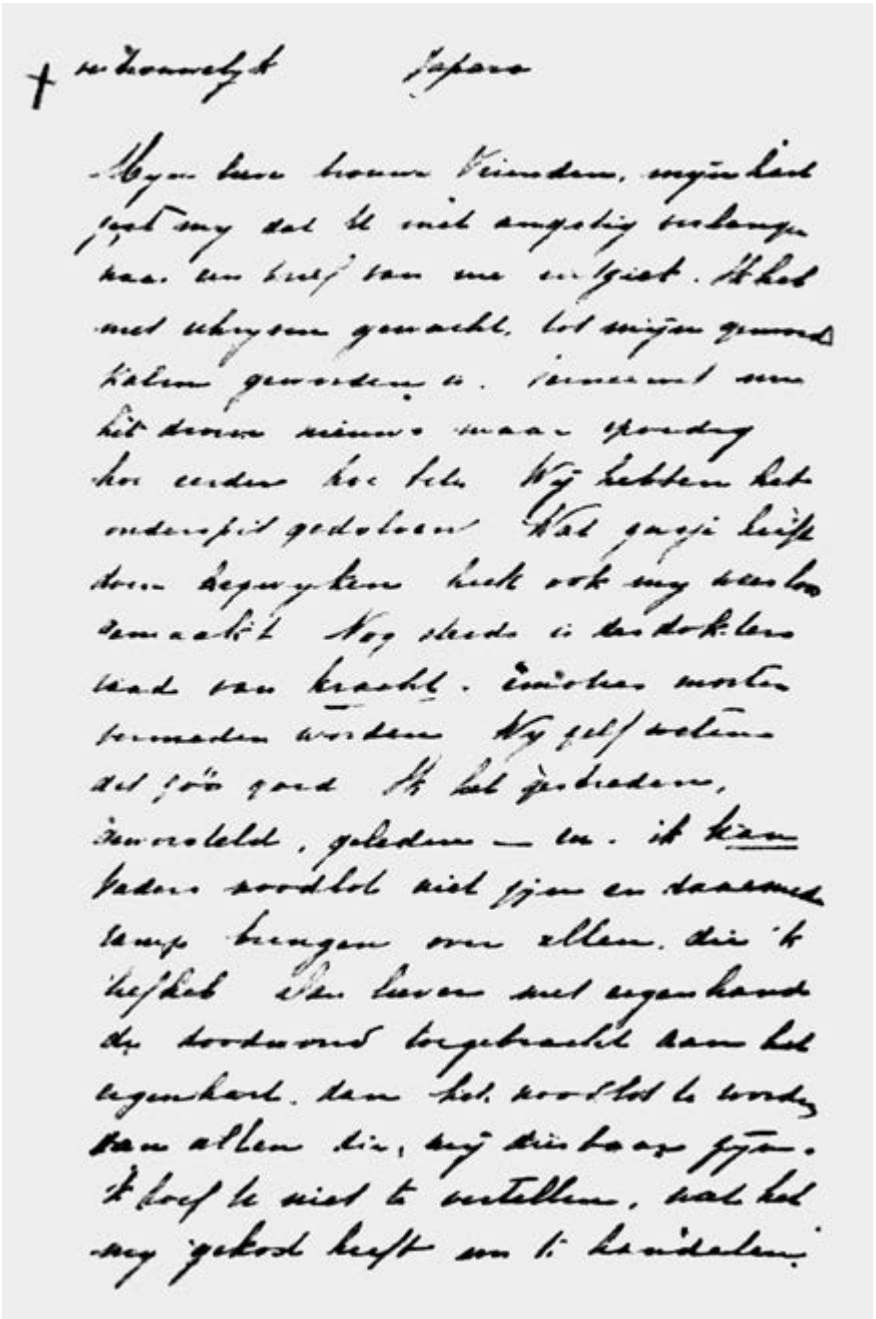

Figure 1. Kartini's letter 14 July 1903 marked 'Vertrouwlijk' (confidential) in which she informs the Abendanons of her arranged marriage.
Source: Royal Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Archive, Inventory 33, H1200, No. 84.

READING KARTINI

A Historical Introduction

The 'her-story' of Raden Ajeng Kartini has become well known throughout the world in the course of the century since her letters were first published in 1911. The aim of this introduction to the compilation of all Kartini's writing as far as it is known to exist today is to clarify the less well-known context in which she was writing between 1898 and 1904. In particular, it aims to alert the reader to the significance of the contemporary events, figures, organizations and sources with whom she communicated or to which she referred. In short, by identifying the historical context in which Kartini came to write what she did, it aims to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the intellectual, cultural, political and social complexities with which she was grappling.

Much has been written about Kartini over the years but ultimately only a reading of, in particular, the letters themselves will suffice to tell the story of her short life.[1] There are many reasons to do so. The writing of Raden Ajeng Kartini is significant not simply as a partial source for her biography but more broadly as a document reflecting on a historically significant moment in the history of the Indonesian nation.[2] That the author is a woman and the writing is from a time when the availability of extended writing by women, even in the West, is limited, and that, moreover, this female colonial subject writes critically of colonialism in a period of Indonesia's history when little documentation of nationalist sentiment yet exists, makes this material unique. Beyond that, the writing also has particular significance as an integral element in the international record of women's emancipation.

Kartini was born on 21 April 1879. She was one of eleven children and the second oldest daughter of a Javanese regent (*bupati*), Raden Mas Adipati Ario

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1 Although the point is not constantly made throughout this introduction, this is not the story of Kartini alone but also that of her sisters, Roekmini and Kardinah (until her marriage in 1901). The sisters were one and two years respectively younger than Kartini and shared in all the activities linked to Kartini's name although it is clear that Kartini was the major initiator. The letters of her sisters have been published separately (Coté 2008).

2 The most widely accepted biography is that by Siti Soemandari Soeroto (2001). One prospective biographer, H Bouman, writing when relevant interviewees were still alive, concluded that a detailed biography was impossible (Bouman 1954). Numerous interpretations of her life have appeared in the course of the twentieth century, one of the most influential in Indonesia(n) being by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1997).

Samingun Sosroningrat, Regent of Jepara (d. 1905) from 1880 to 1905. A member of the Javanese nobility, as regent he held a prominent position in the parallel Javanese administration supervised by the Dutch colonial bureaucracy. Kartini, his fifth child and second eldest daughter, was born to his secondary wife (*garwa ampil* [Javanese] or *selir* [Indonesian]) whom he had married before marrying, as required of his rank, his official consort (*padmi*), a woman of aristocratic birth. A recipient of Western education, Sosroningrat was favourably regarded by the colonial government. He was sufficiently 'modern' to break with Javanese tradition to enable Kartini and her younger sisters, as well as his sons, to attend a European school.[3]

After leaving the local elementary school sometime during her twelfth year,[4] Kartini continued her education informally with the wife of the local European colonial official, Marie Ovink-Soer. She was largely responsible for providing Kartini with a well-stocked Dutch language library, which was supplemented by her father's subscriptions to leading Dutch language newspapers and literary and cultural journals referred to in her correspondence. This stock of Dutch language literature was further augmented by long hours of conversation, in Dutch, with her near-age brother, Sosrokartono during his school holidays. Kartono was a student at the Semarang Hogere Burgerschool (HBS), one of the colony's three grammar schools, during which time he boarded away from home, until he commenced studies in the Netherlands in 1897.[5]

Kartini first came to public attention through her participation in the *Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid*, the national exhibition of women's work that took place in 1898 in the Dutch capital, The Hague. The exhibition was mounted by a consortium of Dutch women's organisations to demonstrate the social and economic importance of women to the nation and to advocate the right of women to work. Her contribution attracted mentions in both the colonial and metropolitan media. This entry into metropolitan discourse was followed in 1899 with an article published in the key Dutch scientific journal,

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3 Following the example of his father, Sosroningrat also employed a governess for his daughters according to one account.

4 Kartini states she left school at age 12 ½ (letter to Rosa Abendanon, August 1900) which suggests that she completed the 1891–92 school year, although it is not clear what grade level she completed. Her younger sisters completed elementary school while all four boys attended secondary (grammar) school. Her older sister, Soelastri apparently did not attend school.

5 In 1900 there were 13 Indonesian and four Chinese enrolled in the three five-year HBS schools with 622 European boys. In 1905 these figures had increased to 36, 15 and 622 respectively (Wal 1963, Statistical Appendix: 697).

Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandse-Indië[6] and by the publication of two short stories in a colony-based women's journal, *De Echo*, in 1899 and 1900.[7] At the same time, in 1899, she commenced writing to a Dutch 'pen friend', Stella Zeehandelaar, a committed feminist living in Amsterdam. In the extensive exchange that ensued in the course of 1899 and early 1900, Kartini broadly summarized her views on contemporary European feminism, Dutch literature, Javanese society and culture, and colonial politics (Coté 2005a).

Kartini's involvement in the Dutch women's movement may have already been part of her broader plan to undertake further education in the Netherlands. Such plans were already in train by 1900, well before her first meeting with the Director of Native Education, Jacques Abendanon (Letter to Marie Ovink-Soer, October 1900) although this is obscured in the original version of her published letters in 1911, and by Kartini herself.[8] In fact, several alternative plans to arrange and fund her study in the Netherlands remained active until the middle of 1903.

After meeting Kartini in August 1900, Abendanon pursued a separate plan for Kartini: this was for her to prepare as a teacher in the colonial capital Batavia. It was an option that Kartini herself had also already considered (Letter to Marie Ovink-Soer, October 1900). In the course of 1901 and 1902, Kartini continued to pursue both plans, although, on the basis of the surviving correspondence, she appears to have intentionally blurred trajectories of these separate plans in writing to different correspondents. What the two had in common, nevertheless, was an end goal: to prepare herself to work towards a better future for her people, as a teacher and writer. Aside from these alternatives, Kartini continued to raise the possibility of training as a doctor or midwife (or nurse) at the East Java Mojowarno mission hospital. This had originally been a suggestion made by Marie Ovink, and although prepared to consider this, at varying times (depending on who she was writing to) Kartini made clear that both the lowly status as hospital worker and the Christian emphasis of the hospital environment made this an unacceptable route to achieve her goal of serving her people.[9] Kartini also dismissed out of hand

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6 'Het Huwelijk bij de Kodjas' (Marriage amongst the Kodja). In 1898 she had submitted an article on the preparation of batik, 'Het Blauw Verfen' (The use of blue dye colouring) which was only published posthumously in 1914.

7 'Een Gouverneur Generaals Dag' (A Governor General's Day) 1899 and 'Een Oorlogsschip op de Ree' (A Warship at Anchor) 1900. Both stories were published anonymously under the pseudonym of Tiga Saudara.

8 See above, Notes on the translation.

9 Women were not admitted to the STOVIA, the school for training Javanese doctors.

the suggestion that she might become the governor general's wife's lady-in-waiting (Letter, Rosa Abendanon, 21 December 1900).

The crucial moment in the narrative concerning Kartini's further education comes with the pre-arranged visit to Jepara in April 1902 by Dutch socialist parliamentarian, Henri van Kol, then on a study tour of the Indies. As a result of their conversation, which Kartini detailed only belatedly to her friends in Batavia, van Kol agreed to lobby, ultimately successfully, on her behalf to obtain Dutch government support. Had she been able to take up the scholarship it would have made her the first Javanese woman to study in the Netherlands. Recognizing the political differences between Abendanon, the reform-minded colonial official, and van Kol, the socialist parliamentarian, Kartini only belatedly reported the details of her meeting with van Kol to Rosa in a series of letters between 10 June 1902 and late July. By July she was confident that Europe would go ahead and that a letter setting out her intentions, would be published in the Netherlands by his wife Nellie.[10] In April 1903 Kartini, together with her sister Roekmini, applied for a colonial government scholarship to train as teachers in the colonial capital. That application had a long journey through the colonial bureaucracy. The relevant bureaucratic exchange extended from 19 April 1903, the date the application was received, to 24 September when a final document recorded the decision that 'both daughters of the Regent of Jepara had decided not to proceed with their plan to study at the expense of the government.'[11] The undisclosed reason for the change was the sudden arrival of an unforeseen marriage proposal.

In 1903, with the colonial bureaucracy clearly against her plan to study in Europe and with both her parents and sympathetic European supporters suggesting the sisters take up the more limited option of teacher training in the colonial capital, Kartini had finally decided to drop plans for studying in the Netherlands. Having earlier been convinced to establish a small classroom at home to cater for the children of her father's subordinates, Kartini had accepted Abendanon's plan, persuasively outlined during a specially arranged

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10 In a supporting letter to Rosa (28 July 1902), Roekmini was adamant that the two women had considered and now rejected the advice of the Abendanons: 'We thank you very much for what you had recommended to us which forced us to sift and search and to come to a specific conclusion. It will be Holland, despite the difficulties'. Kartini meanwhile welcomed the fact that Rosa had now written to Nellie suggesting that any possible rupture between the men had been mended.

11 Abendanon's memoranda are held in the Indonesian national archive, ARSIP Nasional, in Jakarta, Photocopies of documents are included in the Kartini archive at KITLV, Inventory 13, Archive no. H897 (35).

brief personal visit to Jepara, to convert her goal from study in Europe to training as a teacher in Batavia.

In a memorandum to the colonial government of 26 June 1903 (Abendanon 1903) in support of Kartini's application, Director Abendanon referred to his two previous memoranda concerning the case. In the first (19 March 1901) he had proposed that the then three sisters (Kartini, Roekmini and Kardinah)[12] be permitted and funded to undertake teacher training in Batavia.[13] This he subsequently amended (24 June 1901) to report that the women had changed their minds due to their parents' opposition to the plan.[14] But now, in June 1903, with the certainty of their parents' approval (and having personally convinced Kartini not to go to Europe) he outlined in precise detail a plan for them to study in Batavia 'as the best way to provide the desired training as teachers'. This would involve 'a course of study at a private secondary school with attached residential accommodation', while additional courses would be provided for Roekmini in (European style) women's handiwork and first aid training provided by the Association for Nursing. In all his official correspondence Abendanon never made mention of the sisters' desire to study in the Netherlands.

It was just as approval of the colonial government scholarship was confirmed that Kartini was 'ambushed' by a marriage proposal arranged by her father and possibly promoted by her extended family in collaboration with colonial officials. In November 1903 Kartini married Raden Mas Ario Djojo Adiningrat, Regent of Rembang, a Dutch-educated widower, father of six children with several co-wives. It was on condition that she could continue with her own education, establish a school and pursue her ambition to promote the education of women.

In letters concerning the marriage to Anneke Glaser (now Mev. de Buijn), their former teacher, friend and one-time house-guest, both Roekmini and

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12 After Kardinah's marriage in 1901, Kartini and Roekmini continued to work together on their plans to gain further education, in the first instance in the Netherlands, and later in Batavia.

13 Prior to her marriage at the end of 1901, all such plans had included Kardinah, who made up the third member of the '*tiga saudara*', (the threesome) or the third segment of the 'cloverleaf', the two identities Kartini often employed as pseudonyms.

14 In response to the first of Abendanon's memoranda, the office of the government secretary's negative response cited the government's suspicion that 'it is not unlikely that, after having undertaken the examination [to gain the teaching certificate], the Regent [Kartini's father] would wish his daughters to be appointed to the branch of European education and would raise objections to their appointment to a possible government or private elementary school for girls' (Memorandum, Director of Education to Government Secretary, Buitenzorg 6 April 1901).

her father praised Kartini's husband unconditionally.[15] In a reassuring letter to their mutual European girl friend, Roekmini emphasized the suitability of the match. Djojo Adiningrat understood Dutch 'very well' although he chose not to use it. The couple shared similar goals:

> All the ideas that Kartini had been contemplating he had also considered so that their minds were as one from their very first meeting. But, according to Kartini, he would always take a higher position to her, because she felt herself to be his inferior. In his case, you can see from what he does and says, his wisdom and seriousness is the result of his life experience whereas in Kartini's case it is just a question of ideas. It is not because of his education, because he is from just an ordinary background and he only got where he is through hard work and learning from experience. And was it not always Kartini's ideal to one day marry someone who she could look up to? So be assured Anneke that she is content.[16]

She was also privileged, Roekmini wrote, to now have responsibility for the upbringing and education of his six children. Although not her own, this seemed to fulfil a wish she had once expressed to Rosa Abendanon.

Kartini's father, writing to Anneke soon after the wedding day, also expressed his satisfaction that Kartini was now 'suitably married'. Not only had she now automatically gained the prestigious position of regent's wife, he wrote, but she was married to a regent widely admired by the colonial government, who

> had been educated at a vocational school in Leiden and has thus been able to benefit from Western education and a civilised way of life. He is a cultured man with a very appealing nature, is highly regarded and respected by everyone. Kartini is lucky to have a husband who she respects. Could you imagine if she had a husband who was less of a person than she was, it would have been a misfortune of incalculable proportions. However, everything has now concluded well – husband and wife can now live happily together.[17]

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15 These are included in a collection of letters received by Anneke Glaser and recently made available to this writer by a descendant, Mr G Buijn, whose generosity I wish to acknowledge here.

16 Roekmini to Anneke Glaser, 24 July 1903. It has not been possible to confirm or locate further detail about Djojo Adiningrat's time in the Netherlands.

17 Sosroningrat to Anneke Glaser, 9 December 1903.

Kartini's own optimistic letters in 1904 confirm this picture. They speak of her new role as the wife of an influential Javanese leader, her plans to realize her own personal goals now with the support of an influential husband and to contribute to his recognized success in promoting the general welfare of their region.

It was of course not to be a happy ending. Kartini died the following year on 17 September, four days after giving birth to a son she named Singgih, later renamed Soesalip. According to an account by Kartini's sister Roekmini, who arrived on the morning of the funeral, the baby was 'abnormally large, with fiery red cheeks, and the loveliest nose, mouth and eyes' but it had been a difficult birth. Kartini was both physically weakened as a result of regular bouts of illness during her pregnancy and the size of the baby had required the doctor to use instruments.[18]

Concluding with her death, the narrative of the edited correspondence projects all the elements of 'a tragedy'. Her apparent acquiescence to a polygamous marriage represents a striking contrast to her earlier passionately stated opposition to the traditional experience of Javanese noble women explicitly discussed in her early correspondence with Stella Zeehandelaar and Rosa Abendanon. Added to this are the strange circumstances when, in a tragic irony, news of the successful culmination of her dreams for further education came simultaneously with the news of its impossibility.

Taken at their face value, however, Kartini's letters documenting her final year could be interpreted as a new beginning for her and one pointing to what, broadly speaking, came be the agenda for a later Indonesian women's movement (Blackburn 2008). Unlike her sisters, Kartini was of course not destined to witness that future to which, as many have argued, her advocacy of women's emancipation was to contribute. The question of what Kartini's future may have been remains a conundrum, which the Kartini archive (and this publication of her complete extant writing) is unable to resolve.

These are the bare bones of the story of Raden Ayu Djojo Adiningrat, better known by her maiden name, Raden Ajeng Kartini, a life for which her extant correspondence provides almost the only source. However, it is a summary that does little justice to the wealth of historical information contained in this unique collection of letters, some of which stretched to over 30 pages of notepaper. What follows is a brief outline of some of the relevant aspects of that broader history.

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[18] The detail regarding the birth draws on a recently recovered letter by Roekmini written to Annie Glaser (10/10/1904). See also a similar but less detailed letter by Roekmini to Rosita Abendanon dated October 1904 in Coté 2008: 95–99.

Kartini's position in Javanese society

Kartini occupied a privileged position in traditional Javanese society. She was born into a distinguished family that had traditionally ruled much of the northeast regions of central Java. But the aristocratic culture of the Pasisir, the northern Javanese coastal region that formed her immediate environment, distinguished itself from the more formal culture of the Central Javanese royal courts. Several centuries of foreign influences – Chinese, Arab, European and Indian – flowing through the trade networks of the region's ports had resulted in a more cosmopolitan and flexible cultural orientation (Kartodirdjo 1991; Vickers 1993).

Kartini's extended family, the Condronegoro, was one of six or seven dynasties, which had risen to power in the Pasisir through association with the VOC, the Dutch East Indies Trading Company, and the later colonial government (Sutherland 1973). In the course of the nineteenth century this extended family had been appointed to the key administrative posts of an indigenous Javanese civil service, the Pangreh Praja, which had come to form the building blocks of the colonial administration of Java.[19] Between 1808 and 1900 generations of male members of this family had been appointed regents of Pati, Kudus, Demak, Brebes, Jepara and Semarang, thus dominating this north central region of Java. They had become particularly prominent since the 1850s for their embrace of Western education and what the Japanese historian, Kenji Tsuchiya (1986), has described as the *modèrn* culture of nineteenth century colonialism. Kartini's grandfather, PA Condronegoro IV, had engaged CE van Kesteren, the later influential journalist, publisher and commentator on colonial affairs, to tutor his children of both genders. In 1865 one of her uncles, RMAA Prawoto Condronegoro, had published a travelogue of Java that Quinn (1992) has described as the first piece of modern Javanese literature, and had published widely in Javanese and Dutch.[20]

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19 The Javanese civil service hierarchy consisted of the regent (*bupati*), supported by a chief administrator, *patih*, and chief law officer, *jaksa*. A region was divided into districts, each headed by a *wedono*, and further divided into sub-districts headed by an assistant *wedono*. Several regencies comprised a Residency, the building block of the colonial administration, or Binnenlands Bestuur, that supervised this Native administration and was headed by a Resident. Residency subdivisions corresponding to regencies were administered by an Assistant Resident, supported by a junior official, the *controleur,* responsible for supervising the work of the lesser Javanese officials. Residents were accountable to the Governor General in Buitenzorg and the central bureaucracy in Batavia.

20 The travelogue, *Lampah-lampahipun Raden Mas Ario Purwolelono* was published in 1865–6 and re-published in 1880. Quinn (1992) notes that this was also intended to set written Javanese language into a modern print form by introducing a system of punctuation. Condronegoro was also a regular contributor to the first Javanese periodical, *Bromartani*,

They and other similarly 'progressive' Javanese noble families were rewarded with honours and desired appointments for their children. Kartini's uncle, RMAA Hadiningrat, Regent of Demak, and her future husband, RMA Djojo Adiningrat, regent of Rembang, both Dutch educated, were particularly well regarded at the turn of the century by the European bureaucracy. G Gonggrijp, Assistant Resident of Jepara and former *controleur* of Rembang, reportedly liked Djojo Adiningrat 'very much' and thought he was 'just right for Kartini.' He had attended the Queen's coronation in the Netherlands in 1898 and, according to Roekmini, had spent eight years in the Netherlands attending a Dutch vocational school.[21] He had been specifically appointed to undertake the task of eradicating piracy and opium smuggling in the region for which he had been rewarded with high honours and three promotions in the course of fourteen years (Sutherland 1973: 138).[22] Kartini's uncle, RMAA Hadiningrat, had written a provocative memorandum demanding greater access for the Javanese elite to Western education for which he had been conspicuously praised by the influential advocate of colonial reform, Conrad van Deventer.[23]

Kartini's father, Sosroningrat, like most regents, had served an administrative apprenticeship as *wedono*, or local Javanese administrative official, in the sugar plantation district of Mayong before his appointment as Regent of Jepara in 1880. His selection for the post was specifically intended to replace a candidate from a family which had fallen out of favour with colonial authorities (Sutherland 1973: 138). Jepara had once been the seat of a minor kingdom famous because its one-time ruler, Queen Kalinyamat, had led a naval armada against the Portuguese stronghold of Malacca. It had for a time been the administrative centre of the Dutch East Indies Trading Company, the VOC, for the central Javanese coast until its headquarters was transferred to Semarang at the beginning of the eighteenth century, after the realm of Mataram ceded the rights to the town to the VOC (Ricklefs 2001: 45).

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and published a Javanese dictionary and grammar. In 1881 the prestigious *Tijdschrift van het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* (the Netherlands Geographical Society journal) published his detailed critique of the first Dutch ethno-geography of Java, PJ Veth, *Java: Geographisch, Ethnologisch, Historisch* (Haarlem 1875).

21 Roekmini to Anneke Glaser, 24 July 1903.

22 RMAA Sosroningrat to Anneke Glaser, 9 December 1903.

23 Van Deventer devoted an article, 'Een Stem uit Java' (A Voice out of Java) 1900, to draw attention to the importance of Hadiningrat's memorandum to the colonial government, as evidence of the 'Javanese awakening'. Van Deventer had most probably met the regent when he was practising as a lawyer in Semarang.

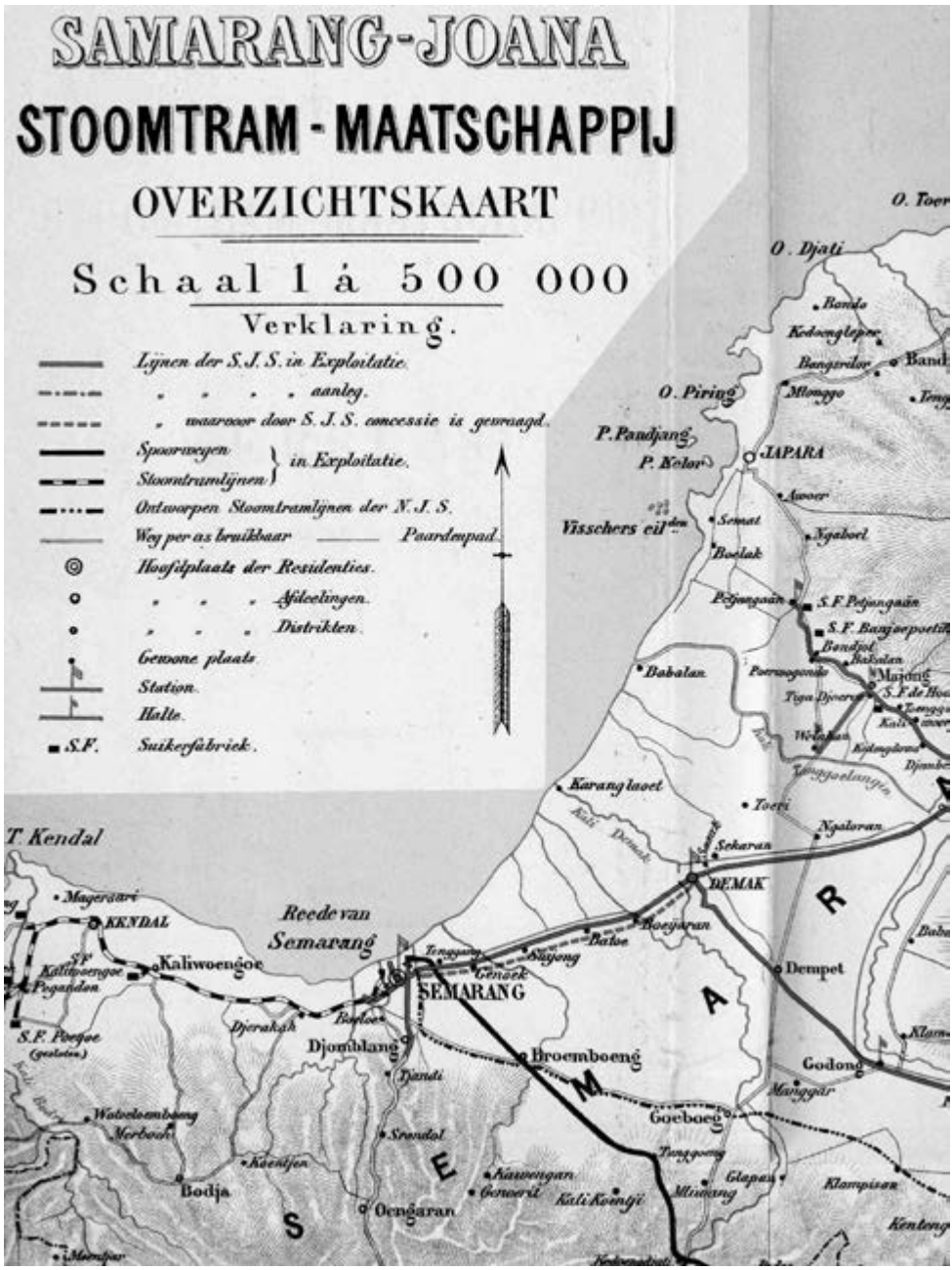
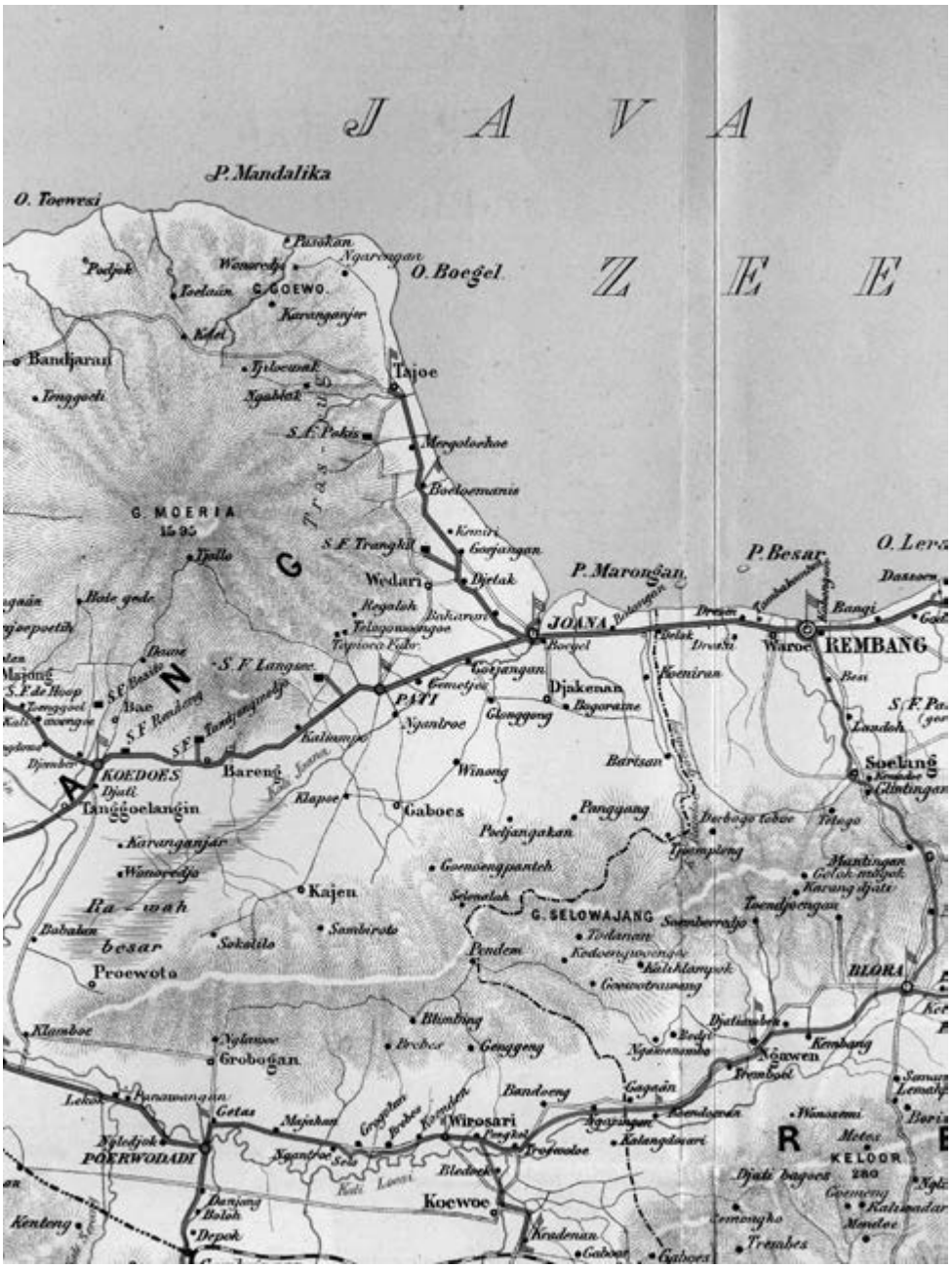


Figure 2. Map of Jepara and environs
Source: Appendix G, De Tramwegen op Java: Gedenkboek Samengesteld ter Gelegenheid van het Vijf en Twintig-jarig Bestaan der Samarang-Joana Stoomtram-Maatschappij (MM Couvée, 1907)


JAVA
ZEE
P. Mandalika
O. Toewesi
O. Boegel
G. GOEWO.
Bandjaran
Tajoe
G. MOERIA
1.995
Wedari
P. Marongan
P. Besar
JOANA
REMBANG
PATI
Djakenan
KOEDOES
Barengê
Soeling
Kajen
G. SELOWAJANG
Proewoto
BLORA
Grobogan
Wirosari
POERWODADI
Koewoe
Kenteng
Ra-wah
besar

At the time of his appointment as regent, Jepara was still the capital of a residency, the largest colonial administrative district and the seat of a resident. However, rationalisation of the colonial administration in 1898 had reduced Jepara to a sub-district of the enlarged residency of Semarang, and thereafter administered by an Assistant Resident supported by a *controleur* (van Doel 1994: 151). Although it still retained a minor port facility and the remnants of what had once been a large European community – Kartini alludes to a racecourse no longer in use – it had become increasingly isolated. It had never been connected to the provincial capital's extensive steam tram and train network that had been developed since the 1860s. The benefits of cane sugar production also by-passed Jepara so the emergence of a Jepara woodcraft industry, which Kartini was instrumental in fostering, provided a significant boon for the town.

Although Kartini's father is revealed in the Kartini correspondence as possibly the least significant member of the Condronegoro family in terms of his influence in colonial administrative matters as well as in family politics, he was considered a loyal official and colonial subject by the Dutch administration. Like all members of the extended family he spoke Dutch, and was regarded as being 'progressive'. But like other members of the family he maintained a critical attitude towards the colonial regime and is known to have written a critical memorandum calling for the abolition of discrimination against Javanese colonial officials by their European superiors (Tjitrosomo 1967: 2). As Kartini reveals in her correspondence, his views were inherited by his sons – as well as his daughters.[24] Three of Kartini's younger brothers refused to join the administrative branch of the colonial service, preferring instead positions in other, less bureaucratic, branches of the expanding colonial administration. The two older brothers who did enter the ranks of the Javanese Pangreh Praja, like their father privately voiced their criticism of colonial practice.[25]

Despite their apparent modern-ness, the family retained a keen sense of its cultural identity. As Kartini's correspondence explicitly reveals, maintaining 'tradition' was a key factor in upholding this proud independence. This is particularly evident in relation to accounts of life inside the *kabupaten*.

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24 Kartini mentions that her father had also written a memorandum on the need for education but, if so, that document has not been recovered.

25 Kartini's two older brothers, RM Slamet and RM Boesono became respectively *jaksa* (law officer) of Semarang and Regent of Ngawi. Sosrokartono, her next oldest brother, studied in the Netherlands, gained a Doctorate in Oriental Languages at Leiden University, and for many years was a journalist in Europe. Kartini enquired on her younger brother's behalf about the training course for agricultural officials.

Within the extended familiy, as Kartini makes clear, it was the most 'progressive' regent, Kartini's uncle, the Regent of Demak, who was also the most active in asserting tradition, particularly where it concerned the traditional role of women. Kartini reports that he attempted everything to prevent his niece from achieving her modern goals.[26] In a move to consolidate his own growing importance, he had selected as his official consort a princess of the central Javanese court of Surakarta, seemingly a familiar practice amongst the lesser nobility to underpin their position (Sutherland 1973).

Within her immediate household it was Kartini's stepmother, the regent's consort, Raden Ayu Moerjam, and her birth mother, Ibu Ngasirah, who are portrayed as the upholders of tradition. RA Moerjam herself was the daughter of the *garwo ampil* (the secondary wife and the daughter of a Jepara village headman) of the previous regent of Jepara who traced his own ancestry to Madurese royalty. Kartini's birth mother, Ibu Ngasirah, brought a different line of tradition into the household. She was Sosroningrat's first wife whom he married in 1872 when she was fourteen (Reksonegoro 1966). She was the daughter of an influential local *kiayi*, Islamic religious leader, in Jepara. Her mother, Njai Haji Siti Aninah, as her name suggests, had undertaken the haj to Mecca (Tjitrosomo 1967). Neither wife had received other than an elementary religious education, although as a married woman, the Raden Ayu had been instructed in Malay language by her educated husband to enable her to carry out her role as consort of a high Javanese official (Reksonegoro 1966: 287).[27] Portrayed as scrupulously upholding their respective conventional social and religious traditions, much of Kartini's story revolves around her attempts to gain these women's acceptance of her views, as well as encouraging her more flexible father to act on his more progressive opinions.

Tracing the on-going tensions that Kartini's pursuit of modern ideas generated within this family exemplifies the difficult trajectory by which new ideas gradually found acceptance in Javanese society. Despite the vehement opposition she experienced initially, in the end Kartini succeeded in gaining her mothers' support. Indeed, after Kartini's death, these remarkable elderly women defended the new ideas they had come to share against the efforts of family members to close down the rupture in tradition that Kartini had

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[26] Kartini reports that Hadiningrat constantly attempted to influence her father and even the Director of Native Education to resist Kartini's aspirations. Following the death of Kartini's father in 1905, he unsuccessfully attempted to prevent Kartini's younger sisters from continuing their Western education (Coté 2008).

[27] In her article Kartini's sister Kardinah, rejects Pramoedya Ananta Toer's portrayal of Kartini, published in 1965 as 'an entirely baseless assertion' (Reksonegoro 1966: 19).

opened up (Coté 2008). An older brother, Boesono, initially presented as 'traditional' and who had been appointed to succeed his father as regent, also came to accept Kartini's views.

The member of the family whose life best represents the effort to bridge 'tradition and modernity' was Kartini's brother, Raden Mas Sosrokartono. In his day he was one of only a handful of indigenous graduates of the academic European grammar school (the HBS) and amongst the first Indonesian students to study in the Netherlands (Poeze 1986). There Kartono played a significant role in the development of the Netherlands-based proto-nationalist Indonesian students society, the Indische Vereeniging, and contributed to early efforts in the Netherlands to promote the reform of colonial policy. After a quarter of a century in Europe, much of the time as corresponding journalist for a variety of international papers, he returned to Java in 1925 and became a revered spiritual healer and mystic (Tjitrosomo 1967).

Thus, in different ways, Kartini's family was redolent with examples both of aspirations to a new modernity and concern with the maintenance of tradition. The apparent tensions and contradictions within this family and as reflected in the account of her personal emotional struggles indicate the significance of this historical moment in Indonesian history. Discussing similar phenomena in the context of the history of colonial India, Partha Chatterjee (1993) has suggested that such ambiguity is more generally characteristic of a period of cultural nationalism within a colonial world. Typically this was expressed in apparently contradictory terms: on the one hand, a demand by nationalists for access to the colonially controlled public (male) world while on the other simultaneously insisting on their cultural difference. In particular, in India too, the latter concern expressed itself most clearly in efforts to safeguard the inner world of cultural tradition, typically represented in the domestic sphere, from colonial interference.

This dichotomy, if it can be said to apply to Java at the beginning of the twentieth century, was the dilemma in which Kartini found herself and which she gradually came to realize she needed to resolve. A careful reading of her correspondence from beginning to end suggests Kartini gradually came to recognize that a radical departure from Javanese tradition, as reflected in her initial uncritical and rapturous welcome of Western feminist ideals, would not be possible or desirable. This is also reflected in the later correspondence in her more effusive appreciation of Javanese tradition. It suggests the beginnings of an articulation of a new national consciousness, as well as specifically providing a model for the modern Javanese woman of the future.

Kartini and the 'Ethical Policy'

Historians of Indonesia have generally referred to the period covered by the Kartini correspondence as the 'ethical period', that is, the period in Dutch colonial history characterized by efforts to reform colonial policy in the interests of improving the welfare of the indigenous population. The declaration of what has become known as the 'Ethical Policy' was made at the opening of the Dutch parliament at the beginning of the new century and advocates of colonial reform have been referred to generically as '*ethici*'.[28] However, to simply characterize the first years of the twentieth century – the time Kartini was writing – in this way would be far too simplistic. In fact, Kartini's correspondence between 1899 and 1904 provides a valuable insight into how reluctant Dutch colonial authorities were to respond to the calls for reform coming from both European and Javanese individuals located in both metropolitan Netherlands and Java.

A detailed history of this period makes clear that the implementation of the reforms some individuals were advocating found little practical expression in the colony until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. As education was one of the central planks of these reformers' aims, Kartini's case provides a unique insight into how slow and reluctant authorities were to implement changes in policy, let alone practice. Although Kartini refers optimistically to policy reform proposed in the Netherlands, changing colonial thinking is primarily indicated with reference to individuals in the colony rather than to the colonial government itself. This is underscored by the fact that all the progressive plans Abendanon proposed as colonial Director of Native Education, Industry and Religion for the expansion of native education and the development of an indigenous economy were firmly resisted by the upper levels of colonial government.[29] His ideas for advancing native welfare were described as fanciful and naïve, a stance maintained by most 'experienced' colonial administrators.[30] It is not surprising, therefore, that

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28 The label 'ethical policy' was coined by Pieter Brooshooft (1845–1921), formerly the editor of the influential Semarang-based newspaper, *De Locomotief*, in a 1901 pamphlet, *De Ethische Koers in de Koloniale Politiek* (The Ethical Direction in Colonial Policy). Brooshoft's trenchant critique of colonial policy over a number of years had inspired the Liberal politician, Conrad van Deventer, formerly a lawyer based in Semarang, and later co-owner of *De Locomotief*, to write his article, 'Een Eereschuld' (A Debt of Honour) in 1899, which is usually regarded as the foundation stone of the Ethical Policy.

29 The further rejection of his detailed 1904 plan to promote indigneous craft industries as a contribution to native welfare may have convinced Abendanon to retire in 1905.

30 Even so, Ricklefs characterizes Abendanon's aims for education as 'elitist' and 'intended to produce leadership for the new Dutch-Indonesian age of enlightenment' (Ricklefs 2001: 199)

Abendanon was motivated to continue his efforts related to the development of colonial education after retiring by, amongst many other activities, editing and publishing Kartini's letters (Miert 1991).

Largely absent from the correspondence, however, is reference to a more critical characteristic of this period in colonial history: the extensive military activity being undertaken in the first decade of the century to extend colonial authority across the archipelago.[31] In part this lacuna can be explained by the fact that, aside from the continuing 'successes' of the colonial army in Aceh, the final stage of the pacification campaign in Bali and eastern Indonesia had yet to begin. One consequence of this 'imperial expansion', as Kuitenbrouwer (1991) has argued, was that for the first time the Dutch claim to the archipelago was now realized in terms of a systematic articulation, geographically and administratively, of a consolidated state. Ironically, it was this that was soon to provide the basis for an Indonesian nationalist movement.

In her letters Kartini expressed a strong sense of regional and ethnic identity as a Javanese but there is as yet little sense of an 'Indonesia' beyond Java. The most palpable sense of the wider colonial state comes through her acquaintance with Dr Nicolaus Adriani, the missionary linguist working on recording the languages of north and central Sulawesi. Kartini could imagine her friend working in this far away corner of the archipelago to advance the condition of primitive natives. Contact with Abendanon's son, Edie, provided Kartini with a concrete sense of colonial activity elsewhere beyond Java, in Sumatra. But only towards the end of the correspondence does she express a more general awareness of a broader 'imagined community'. This was populated by the young Indonesian intellectuals congregating in Batavia and, in even smaller numbers, in the Netherlands, from throughout the archipelago.

In the first years of the twentieth century, then, while Kartini articulates a clear discourse on her aspirations for her Javanese people, there was little indication of a sense of an *Indonesian* nation. We also see little indication of an 'ethical policy' in action in the colony. What is clear from the correspondence is that the years between 1899 and 1904 reveal the *beginnings* of an articulation of a national identity and the beginnings of changes in colonial practice. The two are linked, for, while the latter was not necessarily to the advantage of Indonesians, it did begin to open the way for Indonesians to express their own aspirations.

What Kartini's correspondence does reveal clearly, however, is a growing interest in the colonial subject. In the Netherlands, an emerging sense of an 'imperial responsibility' reflected a broader shift in the political, cultural

[31] There is a brief reference to this in Kartini's letter to Stella 13 January 1900.

and social landscape of the Dutch metropole (Stuurman 1992). At the beginning of the twentieth century colonial authorities were still either reluctant or uncertain about how best to achieve the 'native welfare' that the Dutch government now advertised as its new policy. There was however an emerging sense that what was needed was a long-term process of '*ontwikkeling* or development …[requiring] more interventionist policies that emphasized the Dutch role as tutors to the indigenous people' (Moon 2007: 19). This entailed 'top-down' intervention in indigenous society, which colonial authorities believed necessitated the imposition of the geo-political control of the archipelago that marked the last four decades of Dutch imperialism (Bloembergen and Raben 2009: 7).[32] This sense of imperial responsibility broadly recognized in the historiography of European imperialism as the '*mission civilisatrice*' or 'the whiteman's burden', that also came to define the new orientation in Dutch colonial policy was, as Bloembergen and Raben (2009: 7) point out, 'how colonial powers justified their intervention in non-Western societies'.

It is this general conviction, as yet limited to what can be described as Dutch progressive circles, that can be detected in the group of selected correspondents included in the 1911 publication of *Door Duisternis tot Licht*. These individuals represent each of the various strands of the differing perspectives on and motivations for colonial reform: liberal, socialist, feminist, Christian, philanthropic and humanitarian. Each of these ideological positions came to be represented in contemporary Dutch metropolitan and imperial politics. The 1911 publication of Kartini's correspondence, in fact, provided a platform to unite these various reformist strands in relation to one element of the colonial reform platform: the development of education for indigenous girls.

To appreciate the broader context to which Kartini's writing related would require an extensive detour into Dutch social, cultural and political history, which is beyond the scope of this introduction. Suffice to say, however, that the Netherlands itself at the time was subject to significant cultural changes, which were manifested in political, social and cultural debate. There was also a new sense of national aspiration, in part expressed through an invigorated imperial policy, in which the new direction in colonial policy was implicated. No less significant for colonial policy-making was the growing assertion by leading colonial residents, themselves influenced by these metropolitan

[32] Bloembergen and Raben (2009: 9) argue that the term 'ethical policy' is 'inappropriate as characterization of the late colonial period' and finally opt for defining 'the turbulent changes in the late colonial period' as a form of developmentalism, a complex of 'modernity, citizenship and civilisation'.

changes, for constitutional and political reforms. By the end of the nineteenth century these new discursive themes and political agendas were widely shared across Europe's imperial governments making for a veritable competition in at least the rhetoric of colonial policy reform (Bloembergen 2006).

The differing perspectives that constituted the mood of the times can be gauged by looking more closely at who Kartini's correspondents were.

The recipients of Kartini's letters

The collection of Kartini's letters that have survived define a small circle of ten apparently like-minded Europeans (including two sets of married couples). They are a representative microcosm of – and in some cases important players in – what was emerging as a progressive movement in Dutch metropolitan and colonial society supporting policies of colonial reform at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Hints within the correspondence suggest that her circle of correspondents was much wider than the ten represented in *Door Duisternis tot Licht*. Of particular interest would have been the correspondence Kartini is believed to have exchanged with young Western educated Javanese men. Other correspondents known to have existed include, in particular, Anneke (Annie) Glaser, Kartini's one-time houseguest and friend. Anneke (b. 6 October 1877), who was born and raised in Semarang and newly trained as a teacher,[33] had been specifically appointed to the Jepara European elementary school by the director of education to assist Kartini with her preparation for the teacher's certificate examinations. However Annie had patently refused to provide her letters from Kartini for publication (Bouman 1954).[34] Another major obvious 'absence' is the correspondence with her brother, Sosrokartono, who had played a key role in efforts to enable Kartini to go to Europe and who may well have been a major influence in formulating her ideas.[35] These absences point to the selective nature of the extant documentation of Kartini's life.[36]

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33 Biographical information about Anneke Glaser was kindly provided by her descendant, Mr A Buijn.

34 While Bouman (1954) records that she had burnt her letters from Kartini, it has emerged recently that she retained letters from Kartini's sisters. I am indebted to Dr A Hoekema for bringing this to my attention.

35 There is an evident similarity in Kartini's memorandum, 'Give the Javanese Education' (1903) and Kartono's 1899 speech in the Netherlands, 'The Dutch Language in the Indies'. See Coté 2005a: appendix.

36 Apart from references to this correpondence by Kartini, in a 1910 letter by Augusta de Wit to Abendanon she mentions that she had 'borrowed' Kartini's letters to Kartono. Undoubtedly they wrote to each other in Dutch (De Wit, KITLV Inventory 13, Archive no. H1200: 250.)

On the basis of the letters we do have, one of the most significant correspondents in terms of the historical detail the correspondence provided for posterity, was Stella Zeehandelaar (1874–1936). She appears to have been the first European with whom Kartini conducted an extensive correspondence. Five years older that Kartini, Stella represented the 'new woman' of the Dutch metropole and exemplified the feminist principles of the widely acclaimed contemporary feminist novel, *Hilda van Suylenburg*, the book the two women discussed at length in their letters. Daughter of a provincial doctor, she was an enthusiastic vegetarian, teetotaller and cyclist, and an active member of various socialist feminist organisations. At the time of the correspondence she was working as a clerk in the Amsterdam Post and Telegraphic service. Stella was member of the Geheelonthoudersbond (Total Abstinence Society), an active Toynbee worker promoting work training for the poor and unemployed, and member of the Vereeniging Onderlinge Vrouwenbescherming (Women's Protection Society) since 1897. After her marriage in May 1900 she became increasingly active in the executive of a number of women's associations including the Vereeniging Onderlinge Vrouwenbescherming, and national Comitee voor Moederbescherming en Sexueele Hervorming (National Committee for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform). She was also a member of the Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij, the Social Democratic Workers' Party, with close links to its parliamentary members.[37] It is not known whether Stella was directly involved in the mounting of the 1898 Exhibition of Women's Work where her curiosity about Java may also have been sparked but, in any case, her interest in colonial affairs was defined by the colonial policies of her party membership. It was Stella's response to an advertisement requesting a pen friend, placed on Kartini's behalf in the women's journal *De Hollandsche Lelie* to which Stella was an occasional contributor, that generated the most informative letters on colonial conditions in the Kartini correspondence.

Another 'modern girl', but one Kartini was able to meet in person, was Hilda de Booij, née Boissevain (1877–1975). A highly cultivated 'modern' lady from a prominent cosmopolitan family, she was a recent arrival from the culturally sophisticated, progressive-liberal circles of the Dutch capital. Her husband, Hendrik de Booij (1867–1964), a naval officer, was adjutant to the newly appointed Governor General, Willem Rooseboom (1899–1904). Ensconced at the highest levels of the colonial hierarchy, the couple was typical of the new

[37] Later she was a co-organiser of the Tentoonstelling De Vrouw 1813–1913, the 1913 women's exhibition at which Hilda de Booij presented a lecture on Kartini (based on a biography provided by Roekmini) to launch the Kartini Fonds (Kartini Fund) established to fund the Kartini Schools in Java (Everard 1984: 166–7).

calibre of '*totok*', the common term for the newly arrived Dutch in the colony, who were now filling the higher ranks of the colonial bureaucracy. Hendrik (Han) was member of the Dutch Liberale Unie, a progressive liberal political grouping which supported colonial reform in the Dutch parliament, as was the genial but rather unsuccessful new governor general (Fasseur 2012). Hilda and Kartini met only once, on the occasion when Kartini's father was presented to the new Governor General and his entourage, but Hilda remained a life-long admirer of Kartini, and was later a key promoter of the Kartini Vereeniging, the Dutch organization supporting the establishment of Kartini schools.

Foremost in importance amongst her correspondents in the colony, were Jacques Abendanon and his wife, Rosa Mandri. A resident of the colony since 1875, Jacques Henrij Abendanon (1852–1925) had been a leading colonial law officer until his appointment to the Department of Education and was a key figure in the colony's intellectual life. He began his colonial career in law in 1876 and rose to the position of secretary of the Department of Justice and was briefly president of the colonial law society. He was member of the colonial scientific academy, the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen and member of the Dutch-based Indisch Genootschap, and editor of the colonial law journals, *Het Recht in Nederlandsch Indie* and *Indisch Weekblad van Het Recht* (Hazeu 1926; Miert 1991). He was born in the Dutch West Indies, in Paramaribo, Suriname, into an old Jewish family of 'probably Portuguese-Brazilian origin' (Fasseur 2012) and educated in the Netherlands before embarking on his career in the colonial civil service. He had only recently been in his new post when he and his wife visited Jepara as part of his official tour of Java to elicit responses to his new education proposals. Already aware before the visit of her father's interest in and likely support for the expansion of Western education, he was undoubtedly also already aware of Kartini because of her involvement in the Dutch Exhibition of Women's Work in 1898 and the article she had published in the scientific journal, *Bijdragen*, in 1899. His immediate interest in Kartini now was in her possible appointment to head his proposed school for Javanese girls. Soon after his return from Jepara he initiated an application for funding to enable Kartini and her sisters to undertake the necessary training.

Rosa Manuela Mandri (1857–1944), whom he married in Spain in 1883, was of Puerto Rican and Spanish background but English educated. She had arrived with Abendanon in Batavia in 1886 when she began to learn Dutch. Her infectious Latin temperament and ardent feminism appeared to have immediately endeared her to Kartini during that first visit. The friendship was consolidated soon afterwards with a return visit by Kartini and her family

to the Abendanon residence in Batavia. Aside from one further meeting with Jacques Abendanon in Jepara during another official tour of duty – a momentous meeting during which he convinced her not to proceed with her intention to study in Europe – and a brief meeting in Rembang after Kartini's marriage in 1904, distance prevented further contact in person.

Through her intimate correspondence with Rosa, Kartini also came to know (but never met) her stepsons. Correspondence with Edie, Eduard C. Abendanon (1878–1962), Abendanon's second son, forms an important element in the letter collection. Kartini engages with him as 'a brother', in part because he had known her brother Kartono in the Netherlands. Edie provided Kartini (and the reader) with both another perspective on contemporary European society and a glimpse into another aspect of the colonial world. At the time of the correspondence Abendanon's son had recently completed his engineering qualifications and had gained his first appointment as supervising engineer at the infamous Ombilin coalmines in Sumatra.[38] Later he was to become well known for his geological surveys of newly opened areas of the archipelago, in particular for the extended report on his geological explorations of Sulawesi.[39] Correspondence with this, apparently open-minded, young man elicits some frank expressions of opinion from Kartini, in contrast to a tendency to be more guarded in letters to her other correspondents.

The other important colony-based correspondent was Marie Ovink-Soer (1860–1937), wife of the Assistant Resident of Jepara between 1891 and 1899. She was an acknowledged liberal feminist and minor writer who contributed to Dutch women's journals and was to become well known as writer of children's literature. It was in her company, that is, before the body of extant correspondence commences, that Kartini developed her command of the Dutch language.[40] It was undoubtedly Marie Ovink-Soer who introduced her to the ideas of the Dutch feminist movement and provided her with her extensive collection of Dutch language literature. Despite this long acquaintance, there are relatively few letters to Marie Ovink-Soer after their direct personal contact was interrupted by her husband's transfer to a new post in 1899.[41]

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38 Henri van Kol reported critically on the Ombilin mine in his account of his parliamentary study tour of the colony, which he published in *Uit onze Koloniën* (1903: 32–34).

39 This was reported in EC Abendanon (1915–18).

40 Ovink-Soer confirms this in a letter to Abendanon 13 December 1910 (KITLV Archive H.1200:250).

41 The few existing letters to Ovink-Soer are from after Ovink was transferred from Jepara to a new post. Subsequently dismissed from his position the Ovinks returned to the Netherlands. Prior to this, as almost neighbours, letters were unnecessary although 'notes were often left' she recalled later (Ovink-Soer 1925).

Thereafter, Marie was also largely supplanted in her role as mentor by Kartini's new 'best friend', the wife of a far more important colonial official, Rosa Abendanon.

More influential than either of these two women in Kartini's philosophical development it seems, was Nellie (Petronella) van Kol, née Porreij (1851–1930), wife of the Social Democratic Workers' Party leader and parliamentarian, Henri van Kol. Nellie had lived in Java in the 1880s where she had worked as governess before her marriage. She was an influential figure in the early feminist movement and had been a long time editor of the influential women's journal, *De Vrouw* (The Woman), later becoming best known as an influential writer on children's education and of children's books. At the time of her correspondence with Kartini, Nellie was becoming increasingly involved in the Christian evangelical movement and was soon to join the Salvation Army (Porreij 2008). It was Nellie who introduced Kartini to a Dutch public, first in July 1902 in an article in the journal of Oost en West, the society dedicated to fostering the Dutch public's interest in the East Indies, and secondly to a broader female public in 1903 when she contributed several paragraphs and a photograph to introduce her to the readers of a popular women's journal, the Netherlands-based *Eigen Haard*.

But it was Nellie's husband Henri, the former colonial engineer and long time colonial resident, who made the most significant contribution to what ultimately proved to be Kartini's unsuccessful plans to study in the Netherlands. Hendrikus Hubertus van Kol (1852–1925) was at the time the most important figure in the politics of colonial reform. After resigning from colonial service, he had returned to the Netherlands to head the parliamentary wing of the Dutch Social Democratic Workers' Party and became the architect of its colonial policy reform agenda. In 1896 he had published his views on colonial reform in an anonymous publication, *Land en Volk van Java* (The Land and People of Java) (Kol 2003). In it he had argued that the Netherlands had 'a moral task to relieve the Javanese of his burden, improve his welfare, expand his capacities', a moral responsibility which thus far 'we have shamefully neglected.' (Kol 1896: 58–59). It was van Kol who was instrumental in securing Dutch government support for Kartini to study in the Netherlands (which, of course, in the end she was unable to take up). At the suggestion of Stella Zeehandelaar, he seems to have initially written to Kartini in 1900 but in 1902 van Kol arranged to meet Kartini in person during his study tour of the colony. This took place during a much-publicized visit to her Jepara home in April after which van Kol travelled to Batavia in an attempt to convince Abendanon to support his appeal to the Dutch

parliament to approve a scholarship for Kartini.[42] Due to the publicity the meeting received, which Kartini deplored but recognized could be beneficial, the entire Dutch-literate community in Java now became aware of Kartini's intentions.

Letters to two other recipients, Dr Nicolaus Adriani and Professor GK Anton, round out the circle of correspondents. Nicolaus Adriani (1865–1926), a 'modern' Christian, was a university-trained linguist devoted to the study of East Indies (Austronesian) languages. He had arrived in the colony in 1895 to support the Christian mission in Central Sulawesi as bible translator. In 1898 he had also participated in the 1898 Women's Exhibition, contributing regional artefacts of the Pamona people for its 'native' section. By 1900 Adriani had become well known in Batavia's prestigious Bataviaasch Genootschap, the colony's foremost scientific institution in which Jacques Abendanon was a leading figure, for his ethnographic publications and presentations on his studies concerning the languages of Sulawesi (Kraemer and Adriani 1935). He had been invited to dinner at the Abendanons to meet Kartini in August 1900 and, like Kartini, had found the director of education a useful contact. In his case this was because Abendanon had recommended a significant expansion in funding to mission schools such as Adriani and his colleague, Albert Kruyt, were then establishing for the mission in Poso, central Sulawesi.[43]

Professor Gustav K Anton (1864–1924) was a German professor of politics from Jena. Like Adriani and Abendanon, he was a member of the Bataviaasch Genootschap and an influential member of the Institut Colonial International, which Abendanon also joined after his retirement.[44] Anton was in the Dutch colony to further his study of Dutch colonial practice, having earlier published a favourable analysis of Dutch efforts to 'foster native agriculture

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42 In his report on his study tour, van Kol had also severely criticised the administration of the Semarang resident, Piet Sijthoff. Van Kol's central role in arranging Kartini's scholarship to the Netherlands may well have influenced both Abendanon and Resident Sijthoff against Kartini's plan to study in the Netherlands and this leading socialist's close involvement in the matter also concerned Adriani and Stella.

43 In 1916 Adriani joined Abendanon in organising the first of several colonial education conferences held in the Netherlands to discuss colonial education issues. Kartini was regularly referred to in discussions on the question of language medium and referred to as advocating education in a regional language.

44 Both men were present at the First Universal Races Congress held at the University of London in 1911 to discuss 'in the light of science and the modern conscience, the general relations subsisting between the peoples of the West and those of the East, between the so-called white and the so-called coloured peoples, with a view to encouraging between them a fuller understanding, the most friendly feelings, and a heartier co-operation.' (http://archive.org/stream/papersoninterrac00univiala/papersoninterrac00univiala_djvutxt, accessed December 2012).

in Java' (Grimmer-Solem 2007: 321 fn 37).[45] In a later article that appeared contemporaneously with his visit, Anton had proposed the establishment of an economic union (a '*tolunie*') between the Netherlands and Germany (Stoop 1994).[46] He too had been informed about Kartini by Abendanon who had recommended the visit and overnight stay in the Jepara *kabupaten*.

Beyond this core group, the correspondence references a range of significant figures in the Netherlands and in the colony with whom Kartini was in contact and who expressed interest in Kartini's circumstances, if not in questions of policy concerning the Javanese. These included the editors of two popular women's journals, the Java based *De Echo* and the Dutch *De Hollandsche Lelie*, members of the Dutch parliament and royal court, an assortment of former colonial officials and key members of several philanthropic and Christian missions.[47]

Kartini's relations with her European correspondents

Kartini was well aware of the significance of each of her European correspondents and how she needed to approach her new European friends. Hilda, for instance, a woman not much older than her although elevated by motherhood and social position in the colony, she dealt with as a young colonial neophyte, shielding her from the reality of Javanese tradition and colonial corruption but happily providing the cultural information that so fascinated the new generation of educated colonials. This is exemplified for instance, in Kartini's long letter to Hilda describing her sister Kardinah's wedding in 1902.[48] In contrast, Kartini's responded to the astute questioning of Stella Zeehandelaar in distant Amsterdam in terms that appear to be a well-rehearsed appraisal of contemporary colonial politics. Her letters to Edie Abendanon are couched as friendly conversations with a brother. This was also significant since Kartini perceived this relationship as embodying a key aspect of an imagined modern

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45 Grimmer-Solem cites Anton's 'Über die Neuere Agrarpolitik der Holländer in Java', *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reiche*, 23, 1899, 1337–62.

46 Stoop (1994: 28) discusses Anton's publication, *Ein Zollbündnis mit den Niederlanden* (Dresden 1902) in which Anton argued that unless the Netherlands joined with Germany it would be unable to maintain its colonies. As well as 'improving' the administration of Dutch society and industry, such a union would have the advantage of providing Germany with direct river access to the Atlantic coast.

47 Most important of these were the Dutch organization Oost en West for whom Kartini arranged production of Jepara woodcraft and the Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap mission of Mojowarno where Kartini contemplated becoming a nurse or doctor.

48 Hilda later dedicated herself to advancing the cause of the Kartini schools. In 1913 Kartini's sister, Roekmini provided Hilda with a 'biography' of her sister as a basis for a fund-raising speech to the Dutch Kartini Fonds donors in 1913 (Coté 1994).

colonial society in Java: the possibility of an association of honourable modern Europeans and Javanese, of men and women, as equals.

Kartini addresses Rosa Abendanon as 'her little mother' and within this filial relationship she details at length her feelings and thoughts. Nevertheless, this was not an unrestrained 'stream of consciousness' as, despite the apparent intimacy, Kartini withheld or delayed providing information to Rosa that she had discussed with Nellie van Kol. With Nellie, Kartini exchanged ideas on religion, which were not mentioned in correspondence with Rosa, while the correspondence with Rosa was clearly more important than that with her erstwhile companion, Marie Ovink-Soer. For instance, after ten years of regular contact with the latter she had not revealed to Marie that she was the daughter of her father's 'secondary wife', which she did fairly soon after meeting Rosa.

Not only was the tone and content of letters carefully calibrated to the person, position and nature of the relationship she had with each recipient, for Kartini letter writing allowed her to selectively display her interests, plans and knowledge of contemporary colonial politics, feminist ideas, and current metropolitan literary tastes. To her friends Kartini was prepared to (selectively) voice her criticisms of both colonial practice and Javanese aristocratic tradition in terms more trenchant than European critics like van Kol were prepared to commit to print. She was also well in advance of the Dutch women's movement in expressing concern about the condition of Javanese women. Only towards the end of the decade did her male compatriots begin to express such opinions publicly.[49] Even then, her criticisms of aristocratic Javanese practices of polygamy and arranged marriage, views which she dared not express publicly, and of male attitudes towards women more generally, references to which were largely excised for publication, were never entertained.

Her two academic acquaintances, Adriani and Anton, provided Kartini with an opportunity to demonstrate her understanding of current academic issues relevant to their interests. While engaging knowledgeably with their respective areas of work, and while sensitive to the protocols of position, race and gender, she succeeded in also injecting a lively, sometimes almost flirtatious, conviviality. With Adriani she discussed her religion and his mission work, while feeling free to address him with the familiar term of '*oom*' (uncle). With Anton, Kartini developed a meaningful discussion on 'other cultures' in which she situated herself as an equally informed commentator. In this regard, both

[49] Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century the East Javanese journalist and pioneer Indonesian newspaper editor, Tirto Adhi Soerjo was expressing similar sentiments in articles published in his Malay language newspaper, *Sunda Berita* (Toer 1985).

Stella and Hilda, representatives of a new metropolitan Dutch generation who were clearly fascinated by the ethnographic information about the colony, also had their curiosity about the East provided for. Indeed, what occupied much of her writing to all her correspondents was the desire to inform and to educate them in an attempt to influence their perceptions of, and support for, the aspirations of the Javanese.

In relation to the political figures, Jacques Abendanon and Henri van Kol, men who were in the best position to determine her future, Kartini strikes a business-like tone. With these men Kartini pursued the practicalities related to her plans to continue her studies, in which 'campaign' the two same-age men adopted quite different positions. To van Kol, Kartini wrote with a confidence that would have assured him of the importance of his mission in taking up her case at the highest levels of the Dutch government and in using it to advance his own socialist cause in the Dutch parliament. With Abendanon, the colonial Director of Native Education and Industry and a progressive liberal, equally (and demonstrably) interested in colonial reform but ideologically opposed to van Kol's socialism, Kartini was more cautious.

Aware of colonial sensitivities involved and Abendanon's crucial position in the colonial apparatus in gaining support for her plans, Kartini adopted the formal protocol appropriate to their respective colonial positions. Close reading of the chronology of the correspondence reveals that while pursuing alternative arrangements with supporters including van Kol for her to study in the Netherlands, Kartini politely continued seeking Abendanon's advice for implementing the plans for her that he had initiated. Meanwhile, in a possible attempt to modify his views, Kartini continued to write to his wife in carefully modulated letters of her real interests concerning Europe: her dream of studying in the Netherlands. In these it becomes clear that her hopes continued to lie with the efforts van Kol was making to secure permission and funding to this end.

But central in this surviving body of Kartini's writing is, of course, her relationship with the three older women: Marie Soer, Rosa Mandri and Nellie Porreij. Each was – or had been – a long-time colonial resident fully conversant with colonial conditions and each was married to a man closely involved in colonial policy or practice. At the same time, each woman is revealed in the correspondence as engaged with the new ideas sweeping the Netherlands and each was able to make a link between the circumstances in the colony and the new cultural and political climate of contemporary Europe. In their own way, each of these women was able to establish a bridge between metropolitan Dutch and European colonial society.

Of the three, the most prominent in the correspondence is Rosa Manuela Mandri but there is no evidence of any extant writing by her and no direct indication of her views on feminism or how she perceived Kartini's aspirations outside the references in Kartini's replies to her. Nellie van Kol, however, did leave a public record of her opinion of Kartini in several paragraphs introducing Kartini to a Dutch reading public. In a preface to Kartini's article published in the Dutch women's journal *Eigen Haard* in 1903, she declared that she considered Kartini (whom she had never met in person) as

> amongst the most cultivated and noble women whom I have had the privilege of meeting in my life. In every country and in every religion they would belong to the spiritual elite … For their sake I should not praise these women to the sky, especially not to an audience that hardly know them yet. But I will and can guarantee that the girls are worthy for the most noble-minded of our country to interest themselves in them and their aims.

More detailed were Marie Ovink-Soer's reminiscences of her long relationship with Kartini. In her obituary for Kartini published in 1904 and elaborated later in a 1925 memoir, Marie described how Kartini and her two sisters would 'always be in our home' and how Kartini in particular would always be discussing current events and books with her.

> I can see them again in my thoughts, my young girl friends, occupied with some needlework or other, while I read to them. But often, the embroidery needle was put down, and the book slipped from my fingers as we exchanged our ideas about what I had just read out. At these times Kartini in particular was in her element. She could discuss these things with such youthful enthusiasm and energy…
>
> We attended almost every important and minor event [in Jepara] together, my cloverleaf [three girls] and me. It stood to reason that Kartini and her sisters constantly accompanied us when an official tour of inspection had to be undertaken which could be turned into a pleasurable excursion; there was no native or European celebration, where we were not brought together. We rode out together to a simple bathing place we called Klein Scheveningen and bathed in the safe waters of the bay, in the sun-warmed waves. Or, in evenings, sailed in the harbour boat far out to sea…
>
> My little girl friends were interested in everything, however insignificant. They shared our personal life as if it was their own. At birthdays or other

> anniversaries, the first well wishes or flower tributes always came from the Regent's residence [from them] (Ovink-Soer 1925).

Surviving accounts of first meeting Kartini by several of her correspondents are also revealing of how contemporary Europeans perceived this Dutch-speaking, highly articulate and opinionated Javanese woman. These are particularly insightful since such contemporary comments, after all, can be taken as representative of the attitudes of the emerging avant-garde of the colonial reform movement. Their descriptions of their meeting with her demonstrate clearly how very 'colonial' the perspective of this group still was and how limited their familiarity with Javanese people and society, let alone their awareness of Javanese aspirations, remained. Although on later acquaintance each became more convinced of the seriousness of her determination, without exception the reports of their first encounter reveal how, for each of them, Kartini appeared to be an exotic apparition. She was not like any '*Inlander*' (Native) they had read about or met while, at the same time, they were delighted to find her apparently expressing and confirming *their* ideas.

Kartini herself makes it clear that she was acutely aware of how Europeans perceived her, how both amazed and intrigued they were by her confident and forthright manner and her ability to effectively use and manipulate the Dutch language. While no doubt agreeing with the substance of her criticism of colonial policy and practice expressed in her letters that often also reported verbatim her conversations with European officials, they may have been taken aback by her readiness to do so. Typically these opinions were enveloped in sarcastic and ironic tones that barely disguised a deeper bitterness. Describing his first meeting with the three sisters in 1900 at the home of the Abendanons, Nicolaus Adriani wrote in a letter to his wife several days later:

> [They were] three charming girls, I guess between the ages of 16 and 19. They were all three dressed the same in beautiful white silk jackets with pink flowers, hair in a bun and a small gold necklace on their neck. They really looked very sweet. I went to sit next to the eldest, Roekmini (sic), and very quickly fell into deep discussion with her. She told me what she had seen of the mission in Jepara and demonstrated a real insight into mission work and the attitudes and principles that motivated it. She spoke fluent Dutch with a delightful, soft voice. You would have enjoyed it too, that composed, soft lovely brown face and those large, quite black eyes too. I found it an extraordinary pleasure for once to be able to speak freely with a Javanese woman who was completely at ease … it is wonderful for once to have been able to have a meaningful discussion with an indigenous

> person and these are quite unique because they have only had a European elementary education so this has clearly had a deep impact (Kraemer and Adriani 1935: 125–127).[50]

Not long afterwards, in commenting on the fact that one of the 'girls' wanted to become a teacher, he exclaimed to his wife:

> Can you imagine! A Javanese aristocrat! *Les idées marchant*. Even if this did not proceed she must be quite a girl because she would have to put up with a lot [of criticism] about her plan, from her family etc. (Kraemer and Adriani 1935: 127)

In 1922 in a speech recalling the time he first met Kartini in Jepara during his visit to consult with her father on the question of girls' education, an ageing Abendanon pictured for his English audience

> the most pleasant impression of seeing Kartini and her two younger sisters Roekmini and Kardinah coming to meet us in their elegant national costumes, a light coloured silk kebaya … And then to hear them speak fluently in Dutch with such a sweet expression. I cannot remember ever to have had such an emotional feeling as when listening to their earnest, enthusiastic thoughts. The more we heard, the more we felt enchanted. The day after we left, it was as if we had known them for years. They had the same feeling towards us, which increased when three weeks after, the whole family came to spend some days with us in Batavia (Abendanon 1922).

Hilda, too, was delighted with her first meeting with a Javanese aristocrat but dismayed by what she had come to learn about the colony. Newly arrived in Batavia, she had written (in English) to her Irish mother about the deadening nature of colonial society:

> When I was in Holland I had no idea that there was such a large Indies' [that is, Eurasian] society, the majority of whom do not come to Holland. I don't mean just the nonnas and sinjos, [darker skinned Eurasian women and men] but people [of mixed race] who just look like ordinary Europeans … You can therefore not imagine the bitterness directed at the

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[50] It seems that Adriani was confused about the names. It is clear, however, that he was referring to Kartini. Adriani wrote in similar vein to Abendanon several days after the meeting: 'It is so good to be able, for once, not to be hindered by langage barrier, to be able to speak freely, about whatever one wanted. With cultivated and attractive members of such an interesting nation as the Javanese are' (KITLV archive, H1200: 237).

> Dutch government. I also think it is medieval the way these landowners, all those people whose interest lie here in the Indies, have no chance to have any input into the way the place is governed. You just can't imagine. If the climate did not have such an enervating affect on people and the traditional Dutch [European] element survived more, there would have been a rebellion long ago of all the Indo-Europeans and I think they would have been quite justified. … It is enough for the people here to get mad! … In fact, Han [her husband] himself says that if he were not a real Dutchman he would also join the rebellion.

But meeting Kartini was a delight:

> Last week we had dinner at the palace with the regent of Jepara, the Raden Ayu (that is, his first or chief wife) and three Raden Ajengs, three of his daughters named Cardina (sic), Roekmini, Kartini. The regent and the three daughters speak excellent, softly sounding Dutch. His son [Sosrokartono] is studying in Leiden [University], lives in rooms and, according to the regent, is treated like an Oriental prince and is having too much of a good time … So he is having him return. The three girls were surprisingly nicely dressed that evening. They were wearing a light blue kebaya bordered with silver piping and a variety of gold jewelry. As well, [they wore] beautiful sarongs and bare feet in slippers. The Raden Ayu wore a kebaya of dark silk. The following morning, Han [de Booij], Tom [infant] and I showed them the Botanical Gardens. … It was wonderful to meet the girls. They read a lot, especially in Dutch, and talked about 'Het Jongetje' etc by Borel, about the books by Johanna v Woude, had a subscription to *De Hollandsche Lelie* etc etc …
>
> In Batavia the girls went and looked at everything, the opium factory etc etc. Here [Buitenzorg] they visited the Institute for the Insane between 1 and 3. What they achieved in one day is almost impossible to imagine…[51]
>
> It was more than wonderful to meet such sophisticated and educated Javanese. It really did me good. Not all regent families are so enlightened of course. The regent of Demak [RMAA Hadiningrat, Kartini's uncle] I believe is the one who has written a lot but the regent of Jepara stands out by providing his children with an enlightened education. They will

[51] It was Kartini's only visit to the colonial capital, the centre of European colonial society, and she was evidently intent to see as much of it as she could.

> also travel further in Java, will go to Jokya [sic] and Solo, but will not attend court. Just imagine, if the regent attends court he would have to go bare-chested and with loose hanging hair and sit at the bottom of the steps. If the girls should attend they would need to be completely décolleté, their necks covered in yellow paste and like that crawl in file before the Sultan of Solo and if they made the slightest mistake, they told me, they would be laughed at. 'You will appreciate then that we have no interest in going there.' (Booij 1900)

This rather long account nicely captures the voice of a young Hilda, representative of sophisticated metropolitan European society, being confronted personally and directly for the first time by colonialism, and attempting to come to terms with both the colonial permutations of Dutch-ness and the 'exoticism' of the native society. Like the others, Hilda's account speaks of her excitement at 'discovering' Kartini to be not just aesthetically exotic but intellectually interesting because she spoke Dutch and could speak on subjects that engaged the contemporary European elite.

Despite their enthusiastic embrace of Kartini, in the end each of her Dutch correspondents – at least those for whom direct documented evidence has survived – ultimately disagreed with Kartini's aspiration to study in the Netherlands. This included Jacques Abendanon and Marie Ovink-Soer who personally attempted to convince Kartini to change her plan, and Adriani, Nellie van Kol and even Stella who explicitly expressed views suggesting that they at least acquiesced with the 'inevitability' of Kartini's Javanese future: that she was destined to marry a polygamous Javanese aristocrat. Ultimately then, even amongst this small elite group of Dutch and colonial 'progressives', the boundaries that contained the female colonial subject were to remain strictly circumscribed; the colonial relationship had to be retained for the Dutch civilizing mission to be undertaken.

'Uncle' Adriani stated the position of these friends of Kartini most clearly at the time it was being considered. Writing to his wife in 1902 of his concerns at the prospect of Kartini travelling to the Netherlands to study, he revealed his traditional attitudes towards women's education that no doubt continued to dominate in European thinking:

> Arriving in Holland she might, because of a change in climate, diet and lifestyle, also have physical problems. Her state of mind, which is rather unsettled, as well as her mental faculties and studies, could be tested to the limit. The possibility of mental indigestion is not far-fetched. Furthermore, the girls are not strong … I really worry about these dear

> girls. Their parents are not able to give them sufficient moral support. They themselves are ready for anything but in fact are not capable of everything, even though undoubtedly they are very talented. If they do not come under very experienced and loving care, someone who knows how to ensure they do not become caught up in fashion, will not be invited out to all kinds of parties which would only wear out their nerves; who would prevent them from trying to take on everything at once and ensure they don't study too hard; that they take great care in their clothing, diet and lifestyle, and that they practice self-control, then I foresee a lot of misery and that would pain me greatly (Kraemer and Adriani 1935: 127).

Even Stella recognized Kartini's dream would not be possible but analyzed the problem in terms of contemporary politics. In a letter to Nellie van Kol in 1903 Stella commented:

> … it became clearer to me than I had imagined before how dependent they would be if they travelled here at Government expense and how unhappy that dependency would make them in the end … Also politics would have to play a large role in their lives, which would force them to do many things against their will … after they arrived they would probably spend some time with you … [and] that would create too much of a bad opinion for the government. Can you imagine, lodging with a social democrat!… dependent on a Christian (?) (sic) government they could not possibly do so.
>
> What pain that one issue would have given them, and in this way Eastern sensitivity would be hurt time and time again. And that is why I am pleased that in the interests of the 'business' [i.e. education of Indonesian women] they will stay in the Indies (Bouman 1954: 59–60).

Both Abendanon and Semarang resident, Piet Sijthoff never doubted the inappropriateness of Kartini's aim to study in the Netherlands. Sijthoff, an experienced colonial administrator made sure he presented himself as being in tune with proposals for colonial reform. He had been amongst the early supporters of extending access to Dutch language education to Javanese men (Wal 1963: 20–21). He was a paid-up member of the Bataviaasch Genootschap and the Netherlands-based Aardrijkskundig Genootschap, the key scientific organizations dedicated to publishing the stream of reports on explorations of the Indies. As the official regional colonial authority, Sijthoff was required to provide the necessary supporting memorandum to accompany the application

for a government scholarship and Kartini in several letters reveals that she had met him on numerous official and unofficial occasions – and what she thought of him![52]

In his memorandum Sijthoff expressed his views about Kartini's aspirations very clearly. He agreed that native education needed to be improved and that the education of native women was essential since

> [t]he fact that the education of a people must also involve the nurture provided by the woman in order to take root is a generally recognized truth and now that two educated and decent girls from good backgrounds have offered to contribute to this goal it is opportune to accept this offer with both hands.

But he continued:

> I would strongly advise against allowing the writers of this petition to go to Europe. The overwhelming mass of impressions they would there experience would only confuse them. Moreover, they would only find themselves in circles where etiquette was more dominant than the cultivation of inner refinement and, charmers as they are, they would be so much feted that they would lose their sense of inner peace. (Sijthoff 1903).

He had therefore recommended the women undertake their education in the colonial capital Batavia, which also had the advantage of being 'a not very expensive' preparation for their future task. Kartini was aware, though, that Sijthoff had been 'primed' beforehand by Abendanon!

Kartini's European 'friends' may well have been correct. The experience of her brother Sosrokartono, alluded to in Hilda's letter quoted above and later documented in many letters Kartini's sisters wrote to Rosa Abendanon after she and her husband had returned to the Netherlands, suggests he had experienced much unpleasantness in the Netherlands including poverty and the insidious opposition of some professors. Nevertheless the evidence also suggests that the 'reality' these friends highlighted provided a useful camouflage for the fact that they – and 'colonial opinion' in general – rejected Kartini's personal aspirations and those of her people as unrealistic.

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[52] In a number of letters to Rosa, Kartini reported at length on these meetings with Sijthoff, indicating that he flirted with her in ways that Kartini recognized as typical of the response of European men towards a 'forward' native woman. She also quotes Sijthoff's private opinion that 'women must marry'.

The letters of Kartini

Having sketched the background to this correspondence, we can now turn to the letters themselves and the related writing that Kartini produced between 1898 and 1904. Assembled here as a complete collection in a single volume, the reader is now in a better position to see how the ideas, key phrases and allusions in these letters are developed within a particular historical and personal context. On a more prosaic level, given the length of many of these individual letters, one can appreciate how Kartini was taking short cuts, by repeating expressions of sentiment and, on occasions, entire paragraphs, in trying to keep a group of friends abreast of changing and often dramatic or significant happenings in her life. One can also gain a sense of how important letter writing was for Kartini both to bolster her confidence and to weave together a group of influential friends and supporters.

For Kartini, the correspondence was clearly not a mere indulgence, a vehicle to give expression to sentimental friendship: it had a serious and also an ulterior motive – or rather, set of motives. These, it can be surmised, included to enable her to practise and improve her Dutch language and skill in writing in Dutch; to appropriate into her vocabulary and writing ideas from her reading – to in other words, improve her ability to intellectualize ideas about her particular social and cultural context; and to use these ideas to justify and generate moral support for her personal aims. In modern parlance, Kartini had an 'agenda' which at this time could only be expressed in a Western (universal) discourse, for which the letters provided the 'try-out'. That agenda, drawing on what might be described as a Western social progressive discourse, constituted an attempt to define an alternative modernity for Java in the context of the colonially induced changes that were emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Kartini's 'agenda'

Although Kartini wrote her letters as private communications, they were constructed with great care. At times Kartini makes clear she was conscious of the historical significance of her actions and ideas, and hence the historical significance of her statements.[53] Some extracts of letters were in fact published during her lifetime, and some of their descriptive content was presented in more incidental fashion in her published articles. Overt publicity for her 'cause' – the emancipation of women including the provision of Western education and the

[53] Soetjen Marching (2007) develops this point in her discussion of contemporary Indonesian young women's personal dairies.

end to polygamy and arranged marriage – remained difficult to articulate in her day. It was unacceptable for an unmarried woman of her social position to present herself in public debate. Establishing and maintaining a relationship with a group of recognizably prominent public colonial figures by appealing to their reformist inclinations through private correspondence was, therefore, an astute strategy.

Locher-Scholten (2000: 33), referring to Indonesian women in the 1920s and 30s, writes of how they 'crossed the fluctuating boundaries between private and public'. At the end of the nineteenth century Kartini was beginning to negotiate this emerging 'private-public' boundary when, after having read widely in Dutch feminist literature, she and her sisters participated in the Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid, the Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Work.[54] This represented their first step into the imperial public sphere in their attempt to educate the public of the Dutch metropole. They were to find that their initiative was not appreciated. Kartini (and her sisters) had assumed, given what they had been reading, that their demonstration of the work of Javanese women would be recognized by the Dutch feminist movement and Dutch public at large.[55] However Dutch feminists in the Netherlands had not yet developed an interest in the aspirations of Javanese women (Grever and Waaldijk 1998).

This first incursion by a Javanese woman into the wider imperial world inaugurated what is implicit throughout the later correspondence: her aim to be an informant, to explain the Javanese and their culture to the colonial rulers. In 1898, she presented herself implicitly as the equal of her European sisters, engaged in the same interests as them. Barely months later, in the 15 March 1899 edition of popular weekly journal for young ladies, *De Hollandsche Lelie*, she had presented herself more assertively in appealing directly for a liaison with a Dutch feminist. The appeal, placed on her behalf by the editor read:

> [a] young lady in Java, who has received an extended and enlightened education, a girl who thinks deeply and has a warm heart, would be most pleased if a cultivated fellow subscriber would enter into correspondence with her in order that she might discuss and exchange ideas with an

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54 Quite possibly this had been discussed with and facilitated by Marie Ovink-Soer.

55 Apart from providing its organizers with an exhibit consisting of a detailed set of photographs, samples and descriptions of the Javanese batik craft, Kartini directly introduced herself to the Dutch Queen in a letter accompanied by an offering of samples of the sisters' (European style) paintings (Grever and Waaldijk 1998: 189–192).

> educated girl, for which she feels a great need. (Soeroto 2001: 70; Vreede-de Stuers 1976: 72).

Despite long periods of self-reflection and self-doubt and the obstructionism of Javanese tradition and colonialism, underpinning this long five-year narrative of her hopes for further education and a future as educator of her people, was Kartini's conviction about the essential equality of women and of the colonized subject. However, her father's (and Javanese tradition's) explicit prohibition on appearing in public as a writer, cultural demands for feigned female modesty, as well as her tragically foreshortened life, all contributed to limiting the further expression of this conviction at this particular historical juncture.[56]

Kartini's feminism

Kartini can be called a feminist because she read and espoused the ideals of what is universally recognized as the First Wave feminist movement in Europe. In Britain and in the Netherlands the feminist movement of the late nineteenth century was an influential, multi-faceted movement that contributed to shaping the political debate about social policy. In common with other democratizing movements, feminist discourse in metropolitan Netherlands focused on the condition of working-class families, the right of women to work and education, and gradually, on demands for political representation (Bosch 2004). With regard to the East Indies colony, it was the morality of women in the European enclave that had become a matter of widespread concern in the Netherlands.

In the course of the nineteenth century church-based organizations had established institutions to attend to the moral condition of destitute Eurasians and 'orphans', the latter often the unacknowledged product of European liaisons with Indonesian women. But the main focus of concern by the end of the nineteenth century tended to be on the devastating influence of the mother of Eurasian children and of 'the native prostitute' on the morality and the 'stamina' of the colonial male and of European authority generally (Coté 2009). Even in colonial literature by women writers Eurasian women at the end of the nineteenth century were typically represented in derogatory or patronizing terms (Coté 2005b).

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[56] Extracts from her letters were published in *De Hollandsche Lelie* and *Eigen Haard* in her lifetime, as were three of her four short stories, two under a pseudonym. Kartini also received numerous requests to publish further extracts from her letters and prose compositions by the editors of those periodicals and from *Nederlandsche Taal* and *De Echo*.

Given these preoccupations, Dutch feminism had not yet embraced the issue of the condition of 'the colonized woman' on its own terms. In as far as it was transposed to colonial politics, a 'liberal feminism' was appropriated by advocates of imperial expansion to criticize feudal conditions in indigenous states and to support arguments for the intervention of 'modern colonialism'. The perceived wretched condition of native women subject to the indigenous traditions of polygamous, arranged and child marriage and the precepts of what was described as a medieval religion, were for instance advanced as a justification for the military conquests of Aceh, Bali and Sulawesi. Within Java, criticism of the insalubrious inter-racial sexual relations and domestic arrangements typical of a colony largely serviced by migrating European men underpinned much of the moral discourse around the turn of the century (Taylor 1983; Veth 1900). However, as presented in Kartini's correspondence, both Henri van Kol and Jacques Abendanon, as progressively minded individuals within official circles, provide explicit evidence of how attention to the condition of native women was beginning to inform modern colonial policy.

Although as Kartini's writing reveals, educated individual Dutch women such as Rosa, Marie and Nellie, were beginning to establish meaningful contact with particular Indonesian women, the letters show that this remained a tentative engagement by individuals. In as far as schools for indigenous girls were concerned, although Jacques Abendanon can be rightly credited with advocating this policy, his initial response to Kartini reveals the gap between her ambitions for education and his more conservative assumptions about the aim of 'schools for native girls'.[57] This gap becomes more evident with the founding of the so-called Kartini schools. Established in her name and promoted by women such as Hilda de Booij and male supporters such as Abendanon and that influential promoter of liberal reforms, Conrad van Deventer, the schools remained essentially colonial interpretations of Kartini's Javanese goals.[58] Unsurprisingly Indonesian women, amongst whom Kartini's

[57] While prepared to appoint Kartini as principal of the first of these, he was taken aback by the fact that Kartini wanted to obtain professional teacher qualifications, and even more so that she wanted to first further her intellectual development in the Netherlands. Abendanon's plans as director of education, to experiment with the establishment of girls' schools was blocked on several grounds including because he was advocating the provision of separate schools for Javanese girls to overcome Islamic parents' concerns about mixed schooling. As Abendanon notes in the later edition of *Door Duisternis*, provision of girls' schools notably increased in the second decade of the twentieth century.

[58] Kartini's sister, Kardinah, Raden Aju of Tegal, expressed her criticism of the first of these schools established in Semarang in 1914, although her younger sister's husband was on the school's advisory board (Coté 2008).

contemporary, Dewi Sartika, is the best-known example, began to establish their own schools.

Kartini's feminist ideals, although borrowed directly from Europe, intertwined with her nationalist aspirations. They challenged the traditional values of her Javanese society – in particular those of the Javanese elites – as well as those of her European colony-based male and female supporters. It could even be argued that Kartini was the victim of the contemporary conservative backlash generated by the European debate around the feminist movement. On several occasions she admits having to analyze her actions in the light of comments that her aims for further study would have marked her, in European circles, as a 'bluestocking' or, more generally, in displaying her facility with the Dutch language, that she was acting as a 'coquette'. Kartini was aware of resident Sijthoff's attitudes about 'the new woman', and that his anti-feminist attitudes may have contributed to his having collaborated in arranging for her to be 'married off'. Of the men in Kartini's circle of correspondents and acquaintances, only Henri van Kol appears to have reacted to Kartini as an individual outside the strictures of contemporary gender or colonial precepts. He had of course been educated by his feminist wife and the socialist feminists in his party, but arguably in wholeheartedly supporting her aim to study in the Netherlands he may well have been just as intent on thumbing a nose at his conservative opponents!

What is remarkable in the case of Kartini, then, is how she was able to appropriate Dutch progressive feminist discourse of the late nineteenth century for her critical analysis of Javanese tradition and colonialism. Kartini's feminist education may have commenced under the mentorship of Marie Soer but essentially it occurred during her teenage years between about 1895 and 1898 through reading and in discussion with her three sisters, the '*tiga saudara*', the pseudonym they used for *De Echo*. It had its initial expression in 1898. The (extant) correspondence with Stella Zeehandelaar which commenced soon after her participation in the Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Work allowed her to demonstrate her feminist credentials, not only in itemizing what she had read but also in replicating the underlying discourse. Thus, for instance, Kartini took great pleasure in sharing her joy with Stella on discovering the important feminist texts of Hélène Mercier, the excitement of reading – three times – *Hilda van Suylenberg*, the runaway best-selling feminist text of 1897, and the satisfaction of distinguishing between the writing of the socialist feminist Cornélie Huygens, author of the best-seller *Barthold Meryan,* and the conservative voice of the Dutch women's movement, Anna de Savornin Lohman.

The model provided by her reading of Dutch feminist authors initially encouraged Kartini in her commitment to undertake socially useful work – besides teaching she had considered the possibility of becoming a doctor, midwife or nurse as well as teacher – and to take control of her life rather than conform passively to Javanese tradition. It defined her refusal to accept marriage as the exclusive goal of a woman's life, and to reject polygamy as a fundamental attack on a woman's honour and the moral harmony of family life. And above all it held up for her the ideal of being educated. On the other hand, it was in terms of the same European feminism that she so unhesitatingly celebrated in early letters to Stella in 1899, that later, in a confidential letter of confession (14 July 1903) to Rosa Abendanon defined her as an utter failure in having finally agreed, albeit reluctantly, to a polygamous marriage. In the end, therefore, European feminism represented one further measure of the European (colonial) censure of native life.

A reflective reading of her letters, however, suggests that Kartini had begun to forge an original Javanese version of a feminist agenda. In the course of 1902 her letters suggest she was gradually re-engaging with Javanese tradition, symbolized by a reconciliation with her mothers and what appears to be an appreciative rediscovery of Java. In that year Kartini writes with some passion about her fascination with Chinese culture (January) so influential in the Pasisir; her love of gamelan and traditional arts and a visit to the shrine of an Islamic saint, the Wali Mantigan (March); on the thrill of being given a collection of old Javanese and Arabic manuscripts (August); of her appreciation of Javanese poetry and a visit to a *dukun* (October); and on the possibility of her Chinese and Arab ancestry (October, December). Most significant perhaps is the fact that Kartini begins to articulate her appreciation of *agama Jawa* (traditional syncretic Javanese religion) in her correspondence with Nellie van Kol that she explicitly refers to as *her* religion. While in the early autobiographical account of her childhood she prepared for Rosa she avoids any mention of her formal Islamic or Javanese cultural education and is indirectly critical of the religious underpinning of women's subjugation in traditional society, she now reveals an affection for a comforting, personal Islam.

This, then, arguably constitutes a 'return to tradition' but now in a modernized form. It provided the basis for her reconciliation with her mothers and, ultimately, an ability to see marriage as the pathway back into a Javanese world. In the end, by conditionally accepting a marriage arrangement, it can be argued that Kartini pointed to a new pathway towards modernity for Javanese women in terms very similar to those articulated later by the Indonesian

women's movement (Blackburn 2008).[59] Similarly, Kartini transformed the European ideal of education, which initially she had so aspired to, and modelled herself on. Kartini's own approach to schooling rejected her own European schooling experience. Instead her classroom incorporated elements of Javanese tradition, including the use of Javanese language, pre-empting the approach later embodied in the famous Tamansiswa schools established by Ki Hajar Dewantara.[60]

What Kartini did retain from her reading of Western feminism, a reading framed by an emerging national consciousness, was its insistence that women contribute to the reform of the nation. Her famous 1903 petition, 'Give the Javanese Education', becomes then, not just a feminist document, but one that pointed to a new nationalism that pre-empted the ideals of the later Indonesian nationalist movement. Her educational ideal was premised on an insistence that Javanese themselves (in particular Javanese women) were to be enabled to contribute to the emancipation of the Javanese nation.[61]

Kartini and nationalism

Kartini in fact 'achieved' very little in her brief adult life, although a growing circle of readers were beginning to know of her and the ideas she was espousing were gaining wider acceptance in Java itself. As Adriani had exclaimed to his wife, '*Les idées marchant*!' and as Kartini was aware, a new generation, a '*kaum muda*', was emerging and striving to articulate a sense of the new, of an 'us' that was distinguishable from the interests of Europeans in the Indies (Adam 1995: 98–106; Poeze 1986: 37–50; Toer 1985). In her 1903 educational memoranda, Kartini expressed the hope that a link might be developed between members of the new educated generation who,

> [being] cultivated in mind and spirit … thoroughly conversant with their own language and affairs and alongside this also in Dutch and European knowledge, must process the new on behalf of their countrymen so that the latter may appropriate it for themselves (Kartini 1903).

Four years after Kartini's death these modern young men that Kartini had been in contact with established Budi Utomo, the first public nationalist

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59 It was then also a conclusion which ultimately concurred with the views of the colonial 'conservative progressives' like Abendanon who wanted a reformed Java. The important difference however was that Abendanon was not contemplating a Java that challenged European superiority.

60 Dewantara referenced Kartini's educational ideals in his presentation to the 1916 Colonial Education Conference in the Netherlands, although he expressed no particular interest in the advancement of Javanese women.

61 Her brother made a similar case but in relation to Javanese men in his 1899 address.

institution to provide an organizational basis for the pursuit of the ideals Kartini had also worked towards (Nagazumi 1972).[62]

By the time *Door Duisternis tot Licht* was published in 1911, the number of Indonesian women in colonial government-provided schools, although relative to population remaining abysmally small, had increased significantly.[63] But by 1911 a number of Indonesian women without having read Kartini but sharing the same broad vision of cultural renovation and political emancipation, had already established, or were establishing, their own schools (Toer 1985). These women did not need to *read* Kartini and there is no evidence that these activists sought out the Dutch publication of Kartini's letters. For the Western educated generation of cultural nationalists who emerged after 1910, such as the Javanese prince Noto Soeroto, Kartini's '*gedachten*' 'her thoughts about and for her people' (as Abendanon had characaterized the content of her letters) became more a convenient reference point in communicating their position across the colonial divide than a source of inspiration.[64]

The extant letters reveal the extent to which Kartini's ideas and ideals were similar to those of this emerging *kaum muda* with whom she may have been in communication. But the idea and the geographical territory of a modern 'Indonesia' was still absent from her writing. Kartini's frame of reference was specifically the ethno-cultural heartland of Java. Although a daily reading of

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62 Kartini's sisters, who later discussed the possibility of organizing an informally based network of like-minded individuals along these lines, joined Budi Utomo in 1908 but resigned the following year after learning that its aims and spirit had been stifled by an older and more conservative elite (Coté 2008). Ahmat Adam has demonstrated that a discourse of 'kemajuan' – modernity or progress – can be traced back to writing authored by Western-educated Javanese emerging as early as the 1880s (Adam 1995: 88–90).

63 In 1900 there were 98,173 Indonesians attending Indonesian (vernacular) and 1610 in European (Dutch language) elementary schools. In 1910 these figures had increased respectively to 161,816, and 3674 (Wal 1963: 691– 699). In his introduction to the 4th edition of DDTL (1923) Abendanon notes that in 1922 there were 15 private government-subsidized native girls' schools in Java, apart from the 26 Kartini schools, and across the entire archipelago 1,426 girls attended at government European elementary schools, 17,724 at Dutch medium native (Hollandsch-Inlandsch) government and private elementary schools, 1558 at 'special' schools. A further unknown number of indigenous girls were amongst the 1156 girls at government higher elementary schools and the 34 girls at government and private secondary and vocational schools. A further 57,902 girls were recorded attending the basic 3-year village elementary schools across the archipelago (Abendanon 1923: XXII).

64 Noto Soeroto announced the 1911 publication of Kartini's letters in his *Voordrachten en Mededelingen*, the publication of the Indische Vereeniging, the association of Indonesian students in the Netherlands of which Kartini's brother Sosrokartono was a founding member (Poeze 1986: 75–76).

the Semarang newspaper, *De Locomotief*, would have been sufficient to give her oversight of the entire colonized domain, Kartini's reference to the wider archipelago is limited to the movements of her European correspondents. An 'imagined community' had not yet been articulated in 1900. This is hardly surprising since a modern twentieth century, archipelago-wide, colonial state did not yet exist at the time of her death, while a detailed geographical or ethnographical understanding of the archipelago's inhabitants was only just then being compiled.[65]

Nevertheless, Kartini's references to a '*volk*', a people, or, rather more self-consciously, to 'we Javanese' or to 'my compatriots', referred explicitly to the Javanese nation and were implicitly intended to own and differentiate the interests of '*her* people' from that of Europeans. On a rare occasion she even uses the term '*natie*', nation, to emphasize this distinction. Her ironic use of the generic colonial terms *Inlander/Inlandsch* (Native) or 'the brown race', with their colonial connotations, can also be seen as proud references to a broader sense of community of indigenous people, a sense of an 'us' that could encapsulate an entire colonized people.

But, as Kartini attempts to draw together the disparate interests of her correspondents with her own, this 'imagined community' remains entangled in an imagined ideal of an harmonious cooperation with well-meaning colonials working together for an idealized common good. How else was she to accommodate her close relations and emotional feelings towards her European friends, and her Dutch 'mothers', 'brother' and 'sister'? This model of an imagined future was what came to be known as the ideal of 'association'. It was an ideal propounded or implied by colonial reformers to be achieved, as most notably argued by Snouck Hurgronje (1911), through education. It was also a position widely shared by the first generation of Javanese cultural nationalists and which, for a while, delayed the development of a distinct Indonesian nationalism.

Kartini and 'modernity'

In the first surviving letter written to Stella Zeehandelaar (25 May 1899), Kartini begins with the now well-known paragraph:

> I have so longed to make the acquaintance of a 'modern girl', the proud independent girl whom I so much admire; who confidently steps through life cheerfully and in high spirits, full of enthusiasm and commitment,

[65] The completion of a final military and political conquest of the archipelago (apart from Papua) did not occur until 1910, while the process of 'discovery' of its ethnographic, geographical and economic attributes continued well after that date.

> working not just for her own benefit and happiness alone but also offering herself to a wider society, working for the good of her fellow human beings. I am burning with excitement about this new era and yes, I can say that, even though I will not experience it in the Indies, as regards my thoughts and feelings, I am not part of today's Indies but completely share those of my progressive white sisters in the West.

This was a carefully phrased summation both of her reading of feminist discourse with its emphasis on empowering women to take their place in, and work for, the improvement of society, as well as presenting her own feminist credentials. The key word Kartini emphasizes here is 'modern', and a sense of an impending modernity, distant as that might be, permeates all of Kartini's optimistic early correspondence. Kartini's 'modern-ness' was already evident in the act of letter writing, her mastery of the foreign language in which it was written, in her extravagant utilization of the postal system and no less in the airing of her inner life in an apparent 'stream of consciousness', that the letters document. Moreover, by framing her Javanese world in a modern European language and in recognizable modern Western conceptual terms, the correspondence clearly constructs Kartini then as a modern person. And as the continued interest in her life and writing in the course of the twentieth century suggests, it is this 'modernity' which continues to speak to the modern (foreign) reader who is left with the sense of being in the presence of a contemporary intellect, able to freely cross the boundaries of race, gender, and hierarchy.

But in a sense this is misleading: this sophisticated manipulation of a modern European discourse somewhat obscures perceptions of the *Javanese* Kartini. The Dutch language was only the medium by which Kartini sought to articulate her Javanese aspirations in an attempt to convince the small group of sympathetic Europeans of the significance of what she aspired to for herself and the Javanese people in general. It was the vehicle with which she attempted to direct and foster the growing curiosity of Europeans about 'the other'. In sum, it provided her with a persona that enabled her to be listened to. In her correspondence and in reference to her embryonic schoolroom, Javanese was the language in which she envisaged that she herself and a new generation of Javanese women would realize their potential. It was, however, to be a modernized Javanese culture that would inform them.

This presentation of a modern persona is richly supported in the letters by reference to the artefacts and systems of modernity. In representing herself in her autobiographical sketch as imprisoned in a 'golden cage', and in castigating

aspects of Javanese feudal tradition, Kartini was in fact emphasizing this modern-ness. In her letters and short stories she draws attention to her use of postal and cable services, of photography and tramway system. We see a Kartini making regular use of the steam tram to travel to the city of Semarang for leisure and pleasure: for shopping, for visiting photographic studios, attending theatre and soirees, and calling on distant relatives, and receiving and chatting with European visitors. While train travel had become increasingly popular amongst Javanese (Djoko Suryo 1982), travel to the colonial capital from the east of Java at the beginning of the century must still have been unusual for Javanese women, as too would have been informal visits to the homes of colonials such as the Abendanons, Ovinks and the Sijthoffs.

The representation of a modern life becomes a central theme in the first two of Kartini's published short stories. In these she provided a broad portrait of a modern Javanese life almost indistinguishable from that of a colonial European contemporary. In this context, too, photographs become an important substitute for physical mobility. In requesting and providing portrait photographs, and arranging images of her many correspondents on the shelves of her bookcase, Kartini could confirm the possibility of mobility in modernity, its conquest of the tyranny of distance, the reality of someone she may, in fact, never meet. The idea of the photograph, and its potential to transmit selected images of Java to geographically and culturally distant readers, influenced the style and content of much of her writing.

As importantly, the way Kartini's lived modernity in the context of her own family life (and in her relationships with others) should not be overlooked. Her portrayal of *kabupaten* life – moments of family intimacy on the rear veranda, of girls in their shared bedrooms engaged in heated conversation, of entertaining guests in bright conversation – represents a reconciliation of Western ideals of familial intimacy with aristocratic Javanese tradition already modified by a century of contact with European colonialism. Within the (semi) traditional – or *modèrn* (Tsuchiya 1986) – culture of the *kabupaten*, where the trappings of a colonial European lifestyle had long influenced the external parameters of the aristocratic Javanese life, Kartini practised her modernity on a daily basis – at least this is what she was concerned to project in her correspondence and in her short stories.

But these traces of European culture, evidently, had not yet penetrated all corners of daily life in the Javanese *kabupaten*: Kartini makes clear in accounts of her family that her older siblings had remained firmly attached to traditional modes of conduct, as particularly, did her (step) mother. It was only the younger siblings who adopted a 'culture of family' in a Western

sense and which, as Marie Ovink recalled, Kartini had studied in the house of her mentor. European images of 'the intimate family' formed the basis of a persistent theme in Kartini's representation of modern Java: that relations between siblings, between children and their parents, and between men and women, should be 'normalized'. It was a principle she prided herself in having acted upon in her own home life. She also incorporated it into her ideas about schooling, in her correspondence with the young EC Abendanon and, later, in her dealings with her polygamous husband.

This modern-ness is, of course, an impression consciously projected by Kartini through her correspondence and other writing. And while it was important for her to demonstrate that she was 'modern', and for the reader to recognize Kartini's modern-ness in the context of her times, this should not be allowed to disguise the fact that the correspondence also tracks a movement away from a fascination with Western modernity towards a return to an essential commitment to a modern appreciation of her cultural traditions. Although her death precludes us from seeing how Kartini might finally have resolved her ideas, a good indication of this can be gleaned from the later letters of her sisters who, after all, played a central role in the development of Kartini's thinking.

Kartini herself recognized the conundrum she gradually began to attempt to resolve:

> Who will deliver this people from the kingdom of myths and legends and lead them into the real world? That surely is where things must be headed. But shaking off these superstitions does not necessarily mean they must trample their poetry under foot … There is so much that is beautiful in my people, so much poetry in its lovely naïve beliefs. It might sound strange but it is nevertheless a fact: you Europeans have taught me to love my own land and its people. The European education, instead of estranging us from our nation, has brought us closer to it. It has opened our eyes and hearts to the beauty of our land and people and also … to their needs … their wounds (14 March 1902).[66]

Although borrowing heavily from Western discourse, what Kartini envisaged was an 'alternative modernity' to the version colonial reformers were attempting to impose:

> We definitely do not want to make of them half Europeans or European Javanese: with this free education we aim above all to make of the

[66] Significantly, Kartini here uses the word 'natie' (nation) in this letter for the first time.

> Javanese, real Javanese, Javanese inspired by a love and a passion for their land and people, with an eye and heart for their beautiful qualities and – needs! We want to give them the finer things of the European civilization, not to force out or replace the finer things of their own, but to enrich it. (Letter 10 June 1902, emphasis in the original).

The entire corpus of correspondence, then, amounts to an (unfinished) attempt to define what a Javanese modernity might mean.[67]

Kartini and education

It is in terms of her ideas about education that Kartini is best known and in terms of which the idea of 'modern' can be most readily applied to her. Education, broadly conceived, was central to her conception of a modernized Java and how this might be achieved. Western education played a key role in her own development although it should not be forgotten (even though Kartini herself tended to gloss over it) that she had also received a traditional Javanese women's religious and cultural education as a child (Reksonegoro 1958). Her Western education as the daughter of a Javanese aristocrat had only been possible because of the 'modern-ness' of her father in allowing his daughter to attend a racially mixed co-educational European elementary school.[68] A generation earlier he had himself benefited from his father's willingness to provide his male and female children with a Western education. Male members of Kartini's extended family, as noted above, were known for their Western education, engagement in colonial affairs, and intellectual achievements. Inspired by a later period of Western discourse, and in particular by her reading of feminist literature (as her extensive library of Dutch writing attests) Kartini's 'educated-ness' went far beyond the isolated public incursions of these older male relatives, even though her position as an unmarried woman meant that this remained largely (although not entirely) contained within the confines of private correspondence.

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67 In the context of postcolonial theorizing, Ashcroft (2009: 102) argues that such 'engagements with dominant imperial technologies, [and] their transformation of imperial cultures, … are both models for and agents in the transformation of modernity' rather than producing an 'alternative modernity' they reveal 'the degree to which Western modernity (and the West itself) has been transformed by the creative adaptation of the formerly colonized world'.

68 Kartini's older sister did not – or was not allowed – to attend school. Kartini was withdrawn from school at the end of the school year in which she turned twelve. Her younger sisters completed their elementary schooling and Kartinah continued post elementary education being amongst the first Javanese women to gain a junior teaching certificate.

Despite Kartini's efforts to establish a classroom after years of thinking and writing about the importance of education, her actual involvement in classroom teaching was short-lived.[69] The 'school' as she describes the simple classroom with its small number of select pupils established in one of the out buildings of the kabupaten was far different in practice from what she herself had experienced. Instead of the formality of a traditional European classroom, it embodied the modern ideas of family and interpersonal relations: it represented a microcosm of a modern community freed from the traditional assumptions of both formal colonial and feudal hierarchies. Here, new ideas would be transferred from mother/teacher to child/pupil. It was a concept of childhood learning that was concurrently being developed in Europe, also in reaction to the rigidity and formalism of nineteenth century European public schooling (Bakker 2006: 507–14). Kartini (and later her sister Roekmini) sent repeated requests to Rosa for Fröbel equipment suggesting the influence of Fröbelian methodology and the kindergarten movement.[70] This was another element of Kartini's ability to adapt elements of contemporary modern Western culture for use in developing a modern Javanese cultural consciousness. In this particular case Kartini pre-empted the work of the Javanese educationist Ki Hajar Dewantara who also synthesized the new educational ideas he had studied in the Netherlands with a pronounced nationalist ideology in the formulation of his Tamansiswa school philosophy (Dewantara 1967).[71]

While the tenor of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* appears to suggest Kartini's goal was limited to the education of women, an extended reading of her writing makes clear that she saw the education of women as only one element in the modernization of Javanese society as a whole. In itself this did not differ markedly from the arguments that advocates of colonial reform such as Abendanon were advancing. In his official internal memorandum on the desirability of establishing schools for girls, Abendanon had argued:

> it is an incontestable fact that in these circumstances [the lack of educational facilities for girls] the development of Native society cannot rapidly advance (Wal 1963: 9–12)

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69 It was her sister Roekmini who was effectively responsible for the continuation of this school project from soon after it was established until its closure in 1905.

70 Years later, Kartini's sister Roekmini became a qualified Fröbel teacher (Coté 2008).

71 Like Kartini, Dewantara rejected the Western approach to education of the *ethici* arguing, 'they identified us too much with themselves and measured us against their own Western standards, so that many of their ideals and much of their labor were doomed to strand on the invisible rocks of our uncomprehended inner life' (Dewantara 1967: 155) and criticized contemporary Javanese 'western imitation'.

Abendanon here was alluding to a broader discourse promoted by those who had come to see the role and responsibility of a colonial power as 'development'. Abendanon's biographer, van Miert, suggests that his views on colonial policy had been shaped by a reading of the analysis of Dutch colonial policy by the French colonial expert, Joseph Chailley-Bert published in 1897 (Miert, 1991: 115). Henri van Kol, speaking at an international congress on colonial policy organized by Chailley-Bert in 1900 argued that progress in native societies for which colonial authorities were responsible could only be achieved by the 'slow, patient effort of education and civilization [and the development of] … the available means of production' (Bloembergen 2006: 179). Although argument continued as to the best form of education and language medium – while Abendanon supported the extension of Dutch language education for colonial officials rather expansion of Western education for the mass of the population, van Kol argued for simple and practical education for the masses – the importance of education formed the common denominator of all contemporary colonial discourse in all imperial contexts at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Thus Kartini was clearly engaging in a pre-existing debate with which she would have been confronted in opening any contemporary European publication canvassing social issues. Once again, however, what is important to recognize is the way Kartini took ownership of the debate that swirled around her and directed it pointedly towards the specific needs of Javanese women. Moreover, as her educational memoranda make clear – and in line with the 1899 speech her brother, Kartono, gave in Ghent on the importance of Dutch language education – Kartini's emphasis in advocating girls' education was on the importance of Javanese (women) themselves taking responsibility for the education and advancement of Javanese society. It is in this sense that the Javanese discourse on education – and on pedagogical method – differed notably from that of the parallel colonial discourse and practice, thus making it a vehicle of national awakening.

Kartini and Javanese arts and crafts

The extent to which Kartini's 'practical modernity' ran parallel to the contemporary European and colonial interests is also clearly demonstrated in her discussion of and involvement in the production of Javanese arts and crafts. Throughout the correspondence, alongside strong and repeated criticism of Javanese 'feudal' tradition, itself demonstrably an echo of contemporary European attitudes, Kartini enthusiastically describes her love for traditional Javanese arts: batik, gamelan, woodcarving and related crafts. Indeed, her

involvement in the production of Jepara woodcraft for a European market was perhaps the most significant practical outcome of her activities. In relation to each of these traditional arts, Kartini discussed and advanced ideas about, or in fact developed, new forms. It is this reconception of tradition that also contributes to characterizing Kartini as 'modern'. As Bloembergen (2006) has shown, native artefacts from the East Indies had become a popular drawcard in Dutch exhibits in international and national exhibitions such as the 1898 women's exhibition to which she had contributed. Again, then, one sees in the discourse running through Kartini's correspondence a theme that seemed to echo the latest preoccupations of fashionable Europe.

In her 1898 contribution of an account of the traditional processing of batik (included in this volume) and her contribution of samples of different stages in its preparation, and later, in preparing a 'special gift' of batik for her friend Rosa, Kartini emphasized the importance of the traditional skills involved in the preparation of batik. Here, Kartini was concerned to emphasize the authenticity of the Javanese craft, to satisfy the demands of European *cognoscenti* and arguably to placate their concerns about the contemporary decline of Javanese culture (Grever and Waaldijk 1998: 182–183). But this reassertion of tradition, important as it was to orientalists, should also be seen as evidence of an emerging modern consciousness, a sense of Javanese cultural nationalism.[72]

For Kartini, in this sense 'tradition' had become an object of modern sensibility, something to be consciously practised and maintained, no longer a taken-for-granted way of life. In everyday life she favoured the latest European-inspired versions. Hilda reported in 1900 that, in contrast to her stepmother, the Raden Ayu, Kartini was wearing 'light blue *kebaya* bordered with silver piping', a beautiful sarong and 'bare feet in slippers'. A few days earlier Adriani had reported that she and her sisters were wearing 'beautiful white jackets with pink flowers, hair in a bun and a small gold necklace on their neck'. Other evidence of Kartini's 'modern dress' can be discerned from the surviving studio photographs, which portray Kartini before and after her marriage in light, modern styles of *kain* and *kebaya*. This reflected the modified form of traditional dress and the growing popularity of '*batik Belanda*' favoured by European and Chinese women. Produced by the Chinese and Eurasian batik factories that developed on the north coast of Java in the latter decades of

[72] The later Java Institute and the cultural revival movement around the court of the Mangkunegara became the core of this brief flowering of Javanese nationalism (Ricklefs 2007).

the nineteenth century, they had already established an alternative 'tradition' to the batik styles of the central Java principalities (Veldhuisen 1993).[73]

By the end of the nineteenth century Javanese gamelan music was also being studied, together with other elements of Javanese high culture, by European experts as part of the broader orientalist study of Javanese life and society (Sumarsam 1995: 159). But, as Spiller suggests, at the same time the traditional Javanese music was also changing in conformity to European and Chinese tastes. Kartini's comments on gamelan melodies and her love of a particular 'tune', conforms to Spiller's identification of the growing emphasis on melody and the coordination of ensemble orchestration to 'smooth' the resultant sound and to achieve a 'reconcil[iation of] modern ways with old Hindu-Javanese notions of the universe' (Spiller 2004: 106–7). Here too, however, we can recognize that, while apparently reflecting modern European musical tastes, Kartini was claiming ownership of this universal recognition of gamelan music as an element in a developing articulation of a modern Javanese identity

But it was in relation to woodcarving where Kartini's involvement most obviously interacted with a European interest in its transformation from a craft rooted in traditional and spiritual significance to one increasingly geared to meet the demands of a commercial (foreign) public market as an item of European domestic decoration. As Kartini's correspondence makes clear, 'native arts' had become a fashion item in the homes of the Dutch touched by colonialism and by the end of the century, regular exhibitions and crafts markets began to appear in Batavia and Surabaya, the key centres of the European community. Facilitated by Kartini, the Abendanons were amongst the first regular consumers of 'Java style' woodwork produced by the Jepara craftsmen. Influential colonial promoters of Javanese crafts such as HJW van Lawick van Pabst, chief inspector of cultures, and JE Jasper, the colonial official later commissioned to investigate the development of Javanese crafts, were regular visitors and are regularly referred to in the correspondence.[74]

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73 The north coast Chinese batik producers had developed a distinct light and decorative batik style. Originating from the Pasisir (north coast) region it was natural for Kartini to have adopted these and not the traditional styles from the principalities that her European acquaintances may have expected.

74 Jasper was appointed to undertake an investigation into to the viability of a native craft industry in 1902 that resulted in the establishment of several vocational technical schools. Kartini's sister Roekmini was later appointed to the committee that organized the first Javanese craft exhibition in Surabaya and invited to manage a permanent craft exhibition, a project which, however, never eventuated (Coté 2008). Jasper

Abendanon defined this emerging interest in one of his last major initiatives as director of native industry. In a detailed 546-page report he argued that the promotion, manufacture and sale of traditional arts and crafts would contribute to the indigenous economy and thus promote 'native welfare', the declared aim of Dutch colonial policy (Abendanon 1904).[75] However, the idea of developing a native economy based on traditional crafts was ridiculed by the 'Indies lobby'. Representing the interests of European capitalist enterprises, it argued that native welfare would be best served by the development of European capitalism in the colony. Not surprisingly, it was their perspective on native development, not Abendanon's, which also formed the conclusion of the long-running inquiry into the causes of the decline in native welfare the Mindere Welvaart Onderzoek 1904–1914 initiated under the Dutch government's ethical policy. Abendanon retired soon afterwards, a disillusioned early 'ethici'.

Kartini, who had become the officially recognized agent of Oost en West for the procurement of Jepara craftwork, would have supported Abendanon's plan and indeed may have been his inspiration. She saw her work with the Jepara craftsmen as providing an important economic opportunity for a modern, self-employed Javanese workforce. When planning for her move to Rembang she envisaged the establishment of a craft factory there based on modern principles and with a substantial initial capital investment.[76]

As much as these interests in traditional crafts reflected emerging colonial preoccupations, for Kartini involvement in the industry formed an important element of her expressed pride in Javanese culture. It can be argued that Kartini 'discovered' her tradition through the lens of the imperial 'ethnographic approach' (Bloembergen 2006: 82–85) but it also provided her, in the case of the wood craftsmen, with a direct connection to 'her people'. It was a connection that, although based on traditions of Javanese social hierarchy,

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later published a five-volume report on 'the industrial activity of the indigenous people throughout the archipelago, from both a technological and artistic viewpoint.' (Bloembergen 2006: 254).

75 The descriptive title of Abendanon's report stated that it 'concerned measures to be taken in the interests of native industry in Java and Madura in connection with the funds made available for this purpose in the motherland'. This was a pointed reference to the fact that he saw his proposal as directly relevant to recent parliamentary native welfare proposals. It was rejected as unrealistic. A more influential report was prepared concurrently by Rouffaer and van Deventer (Rouffaer and van Deventer 1904).

76 This plan pre-empted the slightly later proposal advocated by the Javanese journalist and purported instigator of Sarekat Islam Daging, the forerunner of Sarekat Islam, Tirto Adhisoerjo, which he conceived of as a way of developing cooperatives to foster indigenous commercial enterprises (Coté 1998).

Kartini represented in terms of more modern perceptions of interpersonal relations. At the same time this provided Kartini with another avenue for mounting a case for recognition of Javanese aspirations.

As in other areas, here too the reader perceives Kartini's deeper appreciation of her own tradition emerging only gradually in the course of the correspondence, which traces a path not towards the West but away from it. Initially she is somewhat taken aback when, after suggesting some new designs, she discovered:

> It was a real struggle to convince our artists to carve wayang figures. They were terrified that the wayang spirits would be angry with them. Only when father assured them that Father would take all responsibility and that the fury and revenge of the gods would only affect them only trouble him and not them, since they were only carrying out orders, were they prepared to do it. How amusing it was! It is like that in many things. (Kartini 5 March 1902)

While the sentiment of this comment clearly expresses her social position but is also redolent of the arrogance of Western modernity. In time, this is replaced by a perception of the craft work imbued with a sense of connection with its creators, with the beauty of indigenous skill, and its links to some deeper sense of cultural ownership suggested in her story, 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje'.

As in so many other areas here too, then, the thrust of Kartini's views, although clearly influenced by very contemporary and 'progressive' European (colonial and metropolitan Dutch) opinion, was gradually transformed into a clear expression of Javanese ownership.

Kartini and religion

One aspect of the correspondence that becomes more prominent with the reinsertion of editorial deletions, is Kartini's discussion of religion, primarily of Islam and Christianity but also of Buddhism. While this clearly has echoes of a contemporary colonial discourse, religion is also central to Kartini's personal journey. In the first instance this was expressed in a revolt against the traditional religious underpinnings of what she identifies as the major obstructions to women's advancement: the institution of polygamy and the denial of women's right to education. Equally, however, while appreciative of the material contribution of Christian missions to indigenous welfare, she objected to their 'missionizing'. In the course of the correspondence Kartini begins to express views that, while probably drawing much from contemporary Dutch discourse on spiritualism and Theosophy, are clearly expressive of a Javanese syncretic religion.

Kartini's discourse on religion is, understandably perhaps, particularly evident in correspondence with Nellie van Kol and Nicolaus Adriani, both of whom can clearly be located in the vanguard of new movements in Western Christianity. Although associated with a mission himself, Adriani, expressed his dislike of institutionalized religion.[77] He shared with his colleague, Albert Kruyt, a modern interpretation of Christianity that has been termed 'Christian Socialism'. It committed the two to 'educate and civilize' the Pamona people of the Poso region within the framework of their own language and culture (Noort 2006). At the turn of the century Nellie van Kol was gradually turning away from her involvement in Spiritualism and moving increasingly to newer forms of institutionalized evangelical Christianity, by 1908 becoming a member of the Salvation Army (Porreij 2008).

The letters to these two recipients as they are here now presented in their reconstituted form reveal much more of the history of Kartini's religious journey. In the course of 1902 in letters to Adriani and Nellie van Kol – and also to Edie Abendanon – Kartini recounts how as a child she received a traditional women's Islamic education from a female teacher, her growing hostility 'while still a child' to 'following the majority' without knowing the content or reason of the religious rituals and practices she participated in, and, eventually, her rebellion against religion and the despair of her overtly religious mothers. These were details she had avoided in the 'story of my childhood' written in 1900 for Stella and Rosa Abendanon and which previously, had only been revealed in Kardinah's later biography of the sisters, *Tiga Saudara* (Reksonegoro 1958).

In the narrative as now revealed, it is apparent that Kartini's reading of the literature of the European feminist movement during what one might now designate as her 'teenage years', underpinned this rebellion and the gradual formulation of a goal to work for the emancipation of Javanese women. Her airing in correspondence of criticisms of earlier religious experience and of traditional Islam more generally, was evidently encouraged by Adriani, and Kartini was undoubtedly aware of the then current references to 'fanatical Islam' in European circles. She quotes Resident Sijthoff to this effect (Letter, 12 December 1902) and Adriani, like Abendanon, who advocated the increase of government subsidies for mission schools, was personally engaged in a strategy to obstruct the spread of Islam in Central Sulawesi (Coté 2011).

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[77] Although associated with the Poso mission, and sharing with its leader, Albert Kruyt, its educational and cultural principles, his role was limited to that of translator and collector of oral culture and he did not participate in running it (Coté 2011).

Reference to Snouck Hurgronje also makes it clear that she was conversant with this colonial policy; although in another context, Kartini had complained bitterly several times about the 'great man', and that he had no idea about the impact of Islamic tradition on the fate of the women of the Javanese nobility. She was equally aware of the operation of Christian missions. She had had contact with the Baptist mission in Jepara and initially had been keen to learn more about the Mojowarno mission where she had considered the possibility of preparing herself for a 'socially useful life', as a doctor, midwife, or nurse. Adriani had provided some of his own writing and missionary texts related to the Christian mission in Poso. In these instances she had expressed admiration for the dedication of mission personnel, emphasizing their willingess to work for 'her people' rather than their brand of religion.[78]

But Adriani's own religious convictions were far from conventional. Writing to van Kol, Kartini quotes from a letter from Adriani,

> 'What Mevrouw van Kol has allowed you to see is that which is the essence of all religions: a knowledge of God as a person, not just a concept, not the Good but The Good!'… 'Christianity brings no one happiness – it is only the personal relationship with God that gives Christianity its significance.' (Letter, 3 January 1903)

In correspondence with Nellie van Kol, Kartini emphasizes her attraction to this notion of a personal religious commitment and belief, which is apparently a prominent topic in Nellie's letters to her. Kartini emphasises the symbolic imagery based on this new 'personal' turn of the century Christianity: holding fast the 'hand' of the heavenly 'Father', her 'Guide' through the obstacles confronting her life. But reporting on her 'new friend' to her 'brother', EC Abendanon – who may well have been used here as an indirect conduit to convey these feelings to the Abendanons – she writes:

> We feel so rich for the love that poured out from her for us. God has again granted us a warm heart of a friend and via that friendly heart He allowed us to find Him. If only I could tell you how happy we are! We are not jubilantly happy, but quietly, intensely happy, grateful, pleased about what we have found. Just recently we received another letter from Nellie, one full of beautiful, wonderfully noble thoughts. Such a stream of goodness pours out of her. It is a blessing from God that we have been able to meet this pure, superior person.

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78 In his account of his first meeting with Kartini, Adriani had expressed his surprise about the way she spoke knowingly about missionary work.

> 'We are the real friends of humanity,' she says, 'if we seek our support not in the first instance in people, but exclusively within ourselves and in God the Father.' … Then she continues: 'The dearest and best people are just weak, fallible beings. Nestle yourself at the heart of the Father. He shall heal your wounds, dry your tears.' (Letter, 17 August 1902).

While the language used in her discussions with Nellie increasingly appeared to reflect Nellie's new evangelicalism, what she drew from her correspondence was a new sense of religion. Referring later to Resident Sijthoff's remarks about 'fanatical religion' she wrote to Rosa Abendanon:

> Moeke will never have to fear that I would ever preach a holy war. For that reason we had for a long time turned our backs totally against religion because we saw so much lovelessness under the banner of religion. Only gradually did we come to see that it was <u>not</u> the religion that was without love, but that it was the people who made ugly what was originally divinely beautiful.
>
> The most beautiful and the most elevated religion we think is: Love. And does one absolutely have to be a Christian to be able to live according to that divine commandment? The Buddhist, the Brahmin, the Jew, the Muslim, even the Heathen, can also live a life of love. (Letter, 12 December 1902)

In the end – and the road to this conclusion can only savoured by following the detail of the correspondence – the significance of this religious theme is the way it becomes central to the resolution of Kartini's intellectual problem: finding a way to reconcile the Western discourses of modernity she had imbibed so enthusiastically in her youth, and the traditions and realities of the life with which she found herself surrounded as a young adult. It is in this tentative religious discourse, of which we now gain a better appreciation through access to this reconstituted correspondence, that we see, beyond the more obvious criticisms of institutionalized religion, Kartini positing her rediscovery of a Javanese religion.

In retrospect, it appears that after a decade of intellectual activity, in the course of 1902 Kartini arrives at an important point in the evolution of her personal philosophy. It did not resolve the problems she faced regarding her future education, nor lessen the shock of the marriage proposal and its consequences. But it was part of her 'rediscovery' of Java. In a confident final statement on religion to Edie Abendanon (31 January 1903) she writes:

> What would you say to the idea of a mission that did not aim at Christianisation, that avoided all mention of religion but did what it did only out of pure love of the people of Java? Why could there not be more places in Java with institutions such as the one at Mojowarno without them coming under the auspices of a religious organisation? …
>
> If one absolutely wants to teach the Javanese a religion, well, then teach him to know the one and only God, the father of Love, the father of all mankind, of Christians, as well as of Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, etc. Teach them the true religion: that is, the personal one, and one can follow that religion as Christian as well as Muslim etc. Our idea is that the Netherlands should send refined, educated people of moral standing who out of pure love for mankind wish to settle in the midst of the Javanese people, to live and love with them, to instruct them, cure them, help them wherever help is needed.
>
> Leave the people to their simple ways, don't teach them any new things and only intervene gently where their morality is directly opposed to the greatest principle of all: Love. Later this work could be undertaken by their own people. At the moment there are none available. In brief: missionary work without the baptism.

As well as being an astute criticism of the 'ethical' colonial policies of the new Dutch Christian government, this was also a clear rejection of the possibility she may have considered becoming a Christian. Rather, it was a modern formulation of a traditional syncretic conception of moral values.

Kartini as writer

Kartini was first and foremost a writer, an articulator of ideas, rather than an actor. Throughout the correspondence there are references to writing projects or invitations to write. Kartini was of course aware that editors were as much attracted to the idea of a 'native writing in our language' as to the content of what was written. But for Kartini the opportunity to write about 'our people' remained central. In part, the impression that Kartini was *only* a writer results from the fact that an early death ended the possibility of her achieving the plans about which she had written so passionately and had discussed at length with her sisters. It was left to her siblings to realize these dreams, which, in a rapidly changing environment, they succeeded in doing to some extent (Coté 2008).

In articulating ideas about a future she was no different to the pioneering men who articulated a new Javanese and Indonesian national consciousness – but much later. They too, like Kartini, typically came from privileged backgrounds, perceiving it their traditionally prescribed responsibility to act as interpreters of Javanese culture, as informants, and as intermediaries, to enlighten an ignorant Dutch nation and government. To do so effectively, these intermediaries needed not only the language of the colonizer but also the ability to exploit existing colonial discourses and structures, which offered the possibility of successful communication.[79]

In the 'technology' of the letter, which Kartini exploited with great skill, she found an effective medium in which to deliver her message. At the same time, she found in certain new Western discourses an inspiration to identify and strive for change. The European recipients of her letters were equally excited by the possibility of reform and, like Kartini, represented a tiny minority in their own community. The same discourses – of feminism, of socialism, of progressive liberalism – concurrently similarly inspired some elements within the European metropole and the colony to work for change within their own society. In contrast to Kartini, however, where it related to the colonial condition, not only were they more hesitant in drawing emancipatory conclusions from the principles they espoused; ultimately they could not imagine a significantly different world order.

Kartini implicitly and explicitly appropriated contemporary progressive Western ideals to challenge the existing colonial condition and to envisage a future in which Javanese were recognized as equal and entitled to at least share power in a future state whose final contours were as yet not apparent. Two decades on, much of that colonial condition had changed and this future had become clearer. Kartini was not a nationalist in the political sense, as in her day a concept of a modern political community had not yet evolved. She did, however, envisage a 'volk', an 'imagined community' and was deeply conscious of its historical, social and cultural identity. In the decade after her death the themes she developed in private writing in the years between 1899 and 1904 began to find a broader public articulation as a political discourse.

Kartini herself – and her letters – probably did little to advance that development, but what is significant in this extensive archive is that it provides documentary evidence of how such ideas were beginning to permeate Javanese and other Indonesian societies at the end of the nineteenth

[79] As Pramoedya Ananta Toer has shown, Tirto Adhosoerjo represents the best contemporary male comparison to Kartini from this period (Toer 1985).

century. As such, the historical archive she has bequeathed remains particularly important, not just because it was being expressed by a woman, or that it represented a challenge to European domination, but in that it also demanded the renovation of the traditional Javanese domestic sphere, a prerequisite to emancipation which later male compatriots continued to prefer to leave untouched.

Kartini and *Door Duisternis tot Licht*

The knowledge we have of the historical figure that is Kartini has for most of a century been based almost entirely on the publication of an edited selection of her correspondence. This has given rise to a voluminous bibliography of comment, analysis and supposition. The impact of the 1911 publication (and its subsequent reissues and translations) derives from the way the collection of published letter extracts projects a moving story that sits between biography and diarized autobiography. As a series of linked documents it functions as a coherent biography; as a series of personal communications it appears to communicate Kartini's most intimate inner feelings on an almost a day-to-day basis. In fact, however, the form and content in which the publication, *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, presented those letters to a public audience ensures the reader was provided with a carefully constructed portrait of a particular Kartini (Rutherford 1993).

The historical events surrounding the selection and editing of her letters that finally led to their publication in 1911 constructs a space between the reader of the published correspondence and the Kartini who wrote the letters a decade earlier. Their publication was the product of a particular set of historical circumstances that interpreted an earlier historical moment when the letters were written. It needs to be recognized as a distinct intervention of contemporary political significance rather than an exact mirror of an original historical moment. While in his foreword its editor, Jacques Abendanon, presents it as Kartini's ideas about the future of her people, by 1911 what that future might be had become a much more complex and contested issue in which Abendanon had a particular interest.

The publication, *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, was in the first place a Dutch publication intended to raise charitable funds in the Netherlands for the establishment of a particular type of school for young Javanese ladies in the colony as Abendanon had imagined these in his earlier unsuccessful efforts to establish them when Director of Native Education. But it was also intended as an intervention in a competing set of metropolitan Dutch, colonial and

emerging Indonesian nationalist discourses, in which the issue of education was a significant element. After retiring as Director of Native Education in 1905 – and there is a suggestion that it was a forced retirement because of his possibly over-zealous pursuit of reform – Abendanon had continued to actively pursue his ideas for the reform of colonial education, both with regard to the Dutch colony and within the broader context of European colonial education discourse (Hazeu 1926: 339).[80] For many years he hosted the informal discussions of Indonesian students studying in the Netherlands relating to colonial reforms. These meetings ultimately led to the formation of the Indische Vereeniging, one of the first nationalist-inspired Indonesian organizations, which nominated Abendanon as its patron.[81] Abendanon crowned this long post-retirement career in the field of colonial education by organizing two colonial education conferences in the Netherlands, in 1916 and 1919, in which the 'ideas of Kartini' continued to provide a central point of discussion. The publication of Kartini's 'thoughts' was integral to these activities.[82]

The very title of the publication, although it ostensibly quoted from a verse Kartini herself used (and an image she regularly employed), was intended to echo a well-understood European literary image suggestive of 'enlightenment' and widely applied to the modern European imperial project. It was intended to effectively advertise the obvious message that colonial intervention would bring the Javanese out of the darkness in which they were trapped by tradition into the light of modernity. But the verse Kartini quotes in a letter to Edie Abendanon (letter, 15 August 1902) appears to be from a hymn she had apparently heard on an occasion, six years previously, at the inauguration of a Baptist mission church.[83]

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80 Abendanon was a co-founder of the Institut Colonial International and regular contributor to international congresses on colonial policy which it organized

81 It coincided with the establishment of Budi Utomo, also the outcome of Western educated Javanese students.

82 See van Miert (1991) for an extended overview of Jacques Abendanon's career. Outside the Netherlands Abendanon also remained active, participating in several international conferences, including the First Universal Races Congress (1911) and meetings of the Institut Colonial International, and in writing numerous articles on the education policies of a number of national and imperial governments.

83 As quoted by Kartini in a letter to EC Abendanon in a letter of 15 August 1902, the original phrase – '*Door nacht tot licht*' (through night to light) in all probability derived from a (liberal) Dutch Protestant hymnal, the *Godsdienstige Liederen van de Nederlandse Protestantenbond*, first published in 1882. Hymn 55 is entitled 'Door nacht tot licht' (by WJ van der Boor, based on a poem by an eighteenth century German poet LTh Kosegarten.) from which Kartini quotes a verse verbatim. I am indebted ultimately to Dr Pieter Post for the reference and the assistance of Roy Jordaan and Alle Hoekema.

Through night to light
Through storm to peace
Through struggle to honour
Through suffering to commitment

At the time of writing Kartini had indicated that she found great comfort in letters from Nellie van Kol touching on religion. The lines, Kartini writes, were 'still ringing in my ears'. It was the occasion in 1896, as she wrote to Adriani (letter 19 March 1901) and indirectly to Rosa (4 September 1901):

> The singing that rose up from so many throats to reverberate throughout the large building beautifully decorated in green was so beautiful. We joined the respectful congregation below in listening attentively to what was being said in excellent Javanese from the pulpit. Apart from Heer Hubert [the pastor] there were another three missionaries who spoke in turn. And when an ancient Javanese stood up to address his countrymen and fellow believers, it was far from being the least formal moment in the entire occasion.[84]

In recalling the occasion, it was clearly the transformation of this event by the 'ancient Javanese' that had most impressed itself on her. The verse certainly suited the optimistic tome of the particular letter that she had addressed to her Dutch 'brother' concerning 'ons volk' – our people. It had also coincided with her own good news: for Kartini there was now clearly light at the end of a dark tunnel having just obtained the support of Nellie's husband to arrange her education in the Netherlands. Abendanon, mindful of the nature of Dutch politics, had apparently modified the original quotation to remove the recognizable religious connotations of Kartini's original text.

The archive of the publication of DDTL suggests a somewhat hurried and certainly 'messy' production. The earliest letters requesting recipients to provide the letters they had received from Kartini (request to Nellie van Kol) commence in December 1907. In the course of 1908 Abendanon corresponded with Stella (since 1900 Mevrouw Hartshalt) regarding Kartini's letters but was still seeking letters from Hilda de Booij, Marie Ovink-Soer and Annie de Buijn (née Glaser) as late as August 1910.[85] Each of the persons he approached delayed providing their letters either because,

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84 In November of that year Kartini admits rather sheepishly to Rosa that she had attended 'Holy Communion'.

85 Correspondence between Abendanon and recipients of Kartini's letters are brought together in the Abendanon archive held at KITLV Inventory No. 33: 250.

as Hilda said, she wanted more time to reread them, or as Stella indicated, they were questioning whether the letters should be published because 'to me she was always scrupulously frank in expressing her opinions naturally never thinking about the possibility that they might be made public' (Letter to Abendanon, 6 April 1908). While Marie Ovink, Hilda de Booij and Adriani apparently had no hesitation in entrusting the selection and editing to Abendanon, Stella and Annie definitely did, the latter refusing to provide any letters and the former providing only 14 of the 25 letters she had received. Abendanon suppressed 46 letters and severely edited the remaining 48 letters he and his wife had received. The majority of letters used in the 1911 publication, other than those directed to the Abendanons, now exist only as typed versions. Many of these contain phrases and entire lines and paragraphs that are illegible due to heavy erasure, while handwritten footnotes and editorial notes embroider the edges of others. In the editorial process preceding the 1911 publication, the interleaving of the edited extracts of letters from different recipients, often consisting of half pages, further contributes to the confused state of the archive.[86]

Finally, as Kenji Tsuchiya (1986) has noted, an integral element of the 1911 publication, and subsequently reproduced, were the series of etchings depicting the stereotyped scenes of 'tempo doeloe' (times past) which decorated it. These were designed to speak to those Dutch readers, ex-colonials and 'oriental romantics' alike, for whom the publication was intended but also helped to add a coating of sentimentality to the already 'tragic' story.

Nevertheless, if Abendanon can be said to have 'produced' a Kartini for public consumption in the Netherlands, the raw material for this was supplied by Kartini herself. Publication of the letters did conform to an explicit desire – and an occasionally expressed explicit wish – on the part of Kartini to present colonial authorities and the Dutch public with 'the thoughts of and ideas about her people' – the subtitle of DDTL. She was therefore posthumously complicit, as it were, in the publication of her letters, as much as these were simultaneously intended by Abendanon as a political text to support a particular position in the on-going debate on colonial policy. Kartini had created a *persona* but one that Abendanon's editing sharpened and shaped.[87] In presenting Kartini's story in her own words Abendanon

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86 Ultimately, then, there is no absolute guarantee that the letter extracts included in *Door Duisternis* are in fact as Kartini wrote them; almost all are, however, without doubt incomplete.

87 I owe this insight to Goenawan Mohamad who develops this idea in his foreword to Yulianto's translation of Kartini's letters to Zeehandelaar (Mohamad 2004).

produced an effective case for colonial reform. He did not avoid the 'tragedy of Kartini' – Kartini's inability, ultimately, to achieve the hopes and ideals she had espoused, her 'sacrifice to polygamy' – since this provided precisely the emotional drama to support a humane colonial intervention in feudal conditions. Abendanon's *Door Duisternis* became the 'Max Havelaar' of the twentieth century.[88] Indeed, the publication's aim was implicitly to gain support for the need to reform traditional Javanese and other Indonesian nations and to challenge the obstructionism of the contemporary colonial bureaucracy. The process of editing and selecting effectively transformed the letters into a potent '*story*', as Hayden White (1990) might have it, and that story was about the need for a more modern approach to colonization to express the moral obligation of Europeans to 'uplift' the natives under their care. Kartini, however, wanted far more than Abendanon was prepared to admit.

The challenge for the reader of Kartini's letters is to separate Kartini's 'politics' from those of her editor, to distinguish the emerging voice of cultural nationalism from the discourse of colonial reform and to situate this historical moment within the longer trajectory of Indonesian nationalism. Kartini died just as the Ethical Policy was beginning to be enacted. The burst of obituaries by men and women in the Netherlands that followed her death lamented the loss to their cause: the loss of a 'Javanese agent' for their colonial civilizing mission. With her death Kartini would most likely have remained just a hopeful if momentary sign for these reform-minded Europeans were it not for the fact that Jacques Abendanon published her letters seven years later. Without a knowledge of her writing, the course of Indonesian history would have been no different. With the survival of her correspondence, however, we have gained a unique insight into a complex moment in the history of the emergence of the Indonesian nation.

Joost Coté

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88 Multatuli's *Max Havelaar*, published in 1860, became a major vehicle for the advocacy of colonial reform in the second half of the nineteenth century. Dolk (1993) has shown – and references in Kartini's correspondence confirm – that the book, and in particular the story of the Saijah and Adinda, re-emerged as an influential critique of colonialism at the turn of the century amongst Western educated Javanese.

Part One:
Letters

LETTERS 1889

Introduction

The archive of Kartini's correspondence begins in May 1899 with a series of informative letters to a young Amsterdam woman, Estelle (Stella) Zeehandelaar. After contributing to the Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid, the National Exhibition of Women's Work, that ran in the Dutch capital The Hague till September 1898, Kartini had evidently decided to follow up her participation in the Dutch feminist movement by writing to the editor of the popular ladies' journal, *De Hollandsche Lelie*, with an appeal for a Dutch pen friend. This request was relayed by the editor in the edition that appeared on 15 March the following year and it read:

> A young lady in Java, who has received an extended and enlightened education, a girl who thinks deeply and has a warm heart, would be most pleased if a cultivated fellow subscriber would enter into correspondence with her in order that she might discuss and exchange ideas with an educated girl, for which she feels a great need. Should there be anyone so moved, I will happily pass on her address. Ed. (Soeroto 2001: 70).

Correspondence with Stella commenced very soon afterwards, with Kartini's first letter to her dated 25 May. Stella Zeehandelaar was a well-educated and committed feminist and a member of the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij*, the Dutch Social Democratic Workers' Party. From the evidence of Kartini's letters, she had developed a deep interest in contemporary Dutch debates on colonial policy and had possibly been amongst the 94,000 visitors who had visited the Women's Exhibition between July and September the previous year. If so, she would have been impressed by the exhibits of Javanese batik and other crafts as well as the 'native village' which it had featured.

In these initial lengthy letters in response to Stella's well-directed questions, Kartini provides an informative overview of the situation in Java at the end of the nineteenth century. Her comments cover equally the politics and culture of the Javanese and European colonial elite. The letters make clear that Kartini was well read on the emerging 'progressive' view on colonial politics and the issues she touches upon can all be found discussed in the pages of the influential, reform-leaning, colonial daily, *De Locomotief*, and contemporary Dutch periodicals. But one can also detect evidence of the simmering criticism

circulating within the Javanese elite, including her own family, of colonial practice.

What particularly characterizes this group of letters, and which continues into the following year, is Kartini's criticism of formal – or royal – Javanese 'high culture'. The traditions and practices of the Surakarta and Yogyakarta royal courts, regarded in the discourse of European orientalists as emblematic of Javanese culture, were increasingly becoming the focus of European critique. Within Javanese society, the prestige of the aristocracy had been tarnished both by their close association with the European bureaucracy in the eyes of a new generation of Western educated Javanese and its evident disregard for the condition of their subjects (Sutherland 1979; Pemberton 1994). Kartini does not entirely exclude her family from this critique of Javanese feudal culture but is adamant in presenting her father as upholding the traditional role of a Javanese *bupati* in caring for his subjects.

At the same time, these long letters provided Stella – and the later reader – with an excellent introduction to this 'young lady in Java'. In these well-crafted letters Kartini presents herself as modern by her ability to address current issues, publications and colonial gossip, and no less by her effective use of the Dutch language. Expressing her excitement in reading the latest feminist 'best sellers' and other current literary highlights, the 'persona' Kartini was projecting would hardly distinguish her from a Dutch 'freule', a well-born young Dutch lady of the day. This ability to present herself as 'the same' while at the same time bringing to her correspondence with Europeans a sense of her Javanese self remains characteristic of the entire corpus of correspondence. The account of her childhood provided here is the beginning of what becomes a well-rehearsed narrative shaped to fit a European understanding by the time she substantially repeats it in a somewhat longer version for Rosa Abendanon in 1901. When it is compared to a later version of her childhood written by her sister after Independence this 'construction', which omits much of her traditional Javanese education, becomes more evident (Reksonegoro 1958; Coté 1994).

The only other recipient of a letter that has survived from this year marks an equally notable moment in Kartini's life: it is to Marie Ovink-Soer, marking her departure from Jepara. Kartini had developed a close association with Marie, the wife of the Assistant Resident of Jepara, since the couple's arrival in 1892. For much of that time Marie had been Kartini's mentor since being withdrawn from the elementary school. As Marie noted in her obituary for Kartini, they had been constant companions for most of a decade. It is likely that much of what Kartini poured into her letters to Stella had already

been rehearsed in discussion with Marie on the cool veranda of the official residence of the Assistant Resident. In particular, it could only have been Marie Soer who had introduced Kartini to the themes of the Dutch women's movement and quite possibly encouraged Kartini to participate in its historic project to exhibit and campaign for recognition of Javanese women's work. The departure of the Ovinks from Jepara, and not long after from Java, left Kartini bereft of an emotionally and geographically close (European) confidante. This 'gap' was initially filled by the new relationship with Stella until, in August 1900, Kartini met with Rosa Abendanon-Mandri.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

25 May 1899

I have so longed to make the acquaintance of a 'modern girl' – the proud, independent girl whom I admire so much; who walks through life with confidence, is cheerful and in high spirits, full of enthusiasm and commitment; working not just for her own benefit and happiness alone but also offering herself to the wider society, working for the good of her fellow human beings. I am burning with excitement about this new era and – yes – I can say that even though I will not experience it in the Indies, as regards my thoughts and feelings, I am not part of today's Indies but completely share those of my progressive white sisters in the far-off West.

And if the laws of the land allowed, I would like nothing more than to devote myself fully to the activities and efforts being undertaken by the new woman in Europe. Alas, centuries-old traditions, which cannot be broken so readily hold us firmly cloistered in their arms. One day, certainly, those arms will let us go, but that time still lies so far away, so infinitely far away! It will come, I know; but not till three, four generations after us! Oh, you cannot know what it is like to love this present, this new age – your age – with heart and soul, yet, at the same time, be still bound, hand and foot, chained to the laws, practices and customs of one's land from which it is impossible to escape. And the practices and customs of our country are contrary to those which I would dearly like to see introduced into our society. Day and night I ponder on the means by which it might yet be possible to escape the strict traditions and customs of my country and yet …

The centuries-old Eastern traditions are firm and strong but I could shake them from me, break them, were it not for that other bond, even more securely and strongly fixed than any centuries-old tradition which binds me to my

world: the love I have for those who gave me life, to whom I owe everything – everything. Do I have the right to break the heart of those who have shown me nothing but love and goodness throughout my life and who have surrounded me with such tender care? I would break their hearts if I indulged my desires and did what my whole being yearns for with every heartbeat, with every breath I take.

It was not only the voices from outside, from the civilized, reformed Europe that I had heard that made me long for changes to the present situation. Already in my childhood, when the word 'emancipation' did not yet resonate in my ears; when it still had no meaning for me, and articles and books which dealt with it were still far beyond my reach, there awoke in me a longing that gradually became stronger and stronger: the longing for freedom and independence. This yearning was called into life by the conditions in my immediate and general surroundings, situations which broke my heart and made me cry with a nameless sorrow.

And the voices from outside, which were becoming increasingly louder, fertilized the seeds that had been planted in my heart by the deep feelings I had for the suffering of others whom I dearly loved; caused them to germinate, strike roots, grow and thrive.

But for the time being, no more about this – another time some more. Now I want to tell you something about me by way of introduction. I am the oldest, or actually the second daughter of the Regent of Jepara, and have five brothers and sisters – what a large number, eh?[1] My late grandfather, Pangeran Ario Condronegoro of Demak, who was a great proponent of progress, was the first regent in Central Java to open his home to that guest from far across the sea: that is, Western culture.[2] All his children received only a European education and have or had (many of them are no longer alive) inherited a love for progress from their father, and they, in turn, gave their offspring the same education that they themselves had enjoyed. Many of my male cousins and all my older brothers have completed the HBS – the highest educational institution we have here in the Indies – and the youngest of my three older brothers has, for the last three years, been living in the Netherlands to complete his studies.[3] The other two are in the civil service.

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1 Kartini had five sisters; her older sister was already married. In this first extant letter Kartini does not reveal that she is the daughter of the Regent's secondary wife, his *selir*, daughter of a prominent local *kiayi*, rather than of his 'official' consort, the Raden Ayu, his *padmi*.

2 Pangeran Ario Condronegoro IV was Regent of Kudus 1835–1856 and Regent of Demak, 1856–1866.

3 Kartini's older brother Sosrokartono, two years her senior, attended the Semarang HBS (Hogere Burger School). After graduating in 1896 European friends of the family funded his travel and study in the Netherlands.

We girls, chained as we still are to the old practices and customs, were only able to benefit slightly from this progress as regards education. It had already been a great offence against the morals and customs of my country for us girls to go out and be educated and therefore we had to go out of our house every day to attend school. You see, the *adat* of our country strongly forbids young girls to go outside their home. We were not allowed to go anywhere else – and the only educational institution with which our little town is blessed is just an ordinary public elementary school for Europeans. In my twelfth year, I was ordered to stay home – I had to enter the 'box'.[4] I was locked up in the house, totally isolated from the outside world. I could not return to this world unless I was beside my husband, a complete stranger, whom our parents had chosen for us and to whom we can be married off literally without our knowledge. European friends – I only learned this much later – had already tried everything they possibly could to change my parents' views, to change what for this young and life-loving child was such a cruel decision; but they could achieve nothing. My parents were immovable: I entered my prison.[5] For four long years I lived behind four thick walls without ever seeing anything of the outside world.

How I survived that period I do not know – I only know that it was terrible.

It was very fortunate for me that I was not denied the reading of Dutch books or correspondence with Dutch friends. These were the only highlights in that awful, dark period. They were everything to me – without them I may have died, or worse still: my soul, my spirit would have died. But the resounding footsteps of the spirit of the age – my helper and protector – could be heard everywhere. On their approach, proud, solid, old structures tottered on their foundations, strongly barricaded doors sprang open: some as if by themselves, others with difficulty. But open they did and they allowed the unwelcome guest to enter. And wherever he came, he left behind traces.

In my sixteenth year,[6] finally, I saw the outside world once more.[7] Thank God! Thank God! I could leave my prison as a free person and not chained to a husband who had been forced upon me. After six months I saw the outside world for the second time. After that, several events followed one after the other which gradually returned to us girls our lost freedom. And last year,

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4 It is not clear when Kartini commenced school or if she completed her elementary education. She turned 12 in April 1891.

5 Kartini describes her 'prison' in more detail in her letter to Stella of 18 November 1899.

6 Kartini turned 16 in 1895.

7 One of Kartini's first recorded outings was to attend the inauguration of a local Baptist church in 1896.

with the coronation of the young Queen, our parents 'officially' presented us with our freedom. For the first time in our lives we were allowed to leave our hometown and travel to the capital to participate in all the festivities held there in honour of the Queen.[8] This again was a very, very significant victory which we can be very grateful for, and truly are. That young girls of our social class should appear in public is something unheard of here – the 'world' was astounded. Malicious tongues started wagging about this unprecedented event, my European friends cheered and we – we felt as rich as kings!

But I am not satisfied, not at all. I want to go further, much further still. No – attending festivities or frivolities were not what I had yearned for, had never been why I had longed for freedom. I longed to be free to be able to be independent – to be able to make myself independent, not to have to be dependent on anyone, to … never to have to marry.

But we must marry, must, must. Not to marry is the greatest crime a Muslim[9] woman can commit, it is the greatest scandal that could befall a Native[10] girl and her family.

And marriage here … oh, 'wretched' is too feeble a word to describe it! How could it be otherwise if the laws have been made in such as way as to totally favour the man and ignore the woman? If both the law and conventional wisdom favour the man – allow the man to do everything, everything?

Love, what do we know here about love? How can we love a man and a man love us, if we do not know each other – yes, not even be allowed to see each other? Young women and men are kept strictly apart from each other …

* * * *

Yes, I would love to know everything about your vocation, it seems to me to be very interesting. And would you[11] then also tell me about the studies you took beforehand to prepare for it? I would also very much like to learn more

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8 There is no reference to a 1898 trip to Batavia. Kartini evidently means Semarang.

9 Throughout her correspondence Kartini uses the term 'Mohammedan', commonly used in European writing at the time in reference to Muslims. All such references in the letters have been changed to 'Muslim' or 'Islam'.

10 Where Kartini uses the colonial term 'Inlandsch/e' or 'inlandsch' when referring to her people in general this is translated as 'Native'/'native'. She also occasionally uses the term 'inborling(en)' (lit - indigenous) which carried more negative (colonial) connotations.

11 In this first letter to Stella Kartini uses the formal 'you' (Dutch: *U*). In subsequent letters she uses the familiar form of 'you' (Dutch: *jij* or *je*) and 'your' (*jou*) to express the level of intimacy that had developed. When she occasionally reverts to the formal 'you' she corrects herself.

about your Toynbee evenings[12] as well as the total abstinence society of which you are such an energetic member. We do not have anything like this in the Indies but I am very interested in it. Won't you please describe one of these Toynbee evenings for me some time? I would really like that; to learn more about this work of neighbourly love, as I can learn little from the newspapers and magazines.

In Native society, thank God, we do not yet have to fight against the demon drink[13] – but I fear, I fear that when once – forgive me – Western civilization becomes established here we will also have to contend with that evil. Civilization is a blessing but it also has its darker side. The urge to imitate is inherent in human beings, I believe. The masses imitate the habits of their betters, who in turn follow those of the higher classes and ultimately these imitate those at the very top – the Europeans.

It is not a real celebration here if there is no accompanying drink. These days one regularly observes when Natives are celebrating – at least where they are not strictly religious (and most are only Muslim because their father, grandfather and other ancestors were Muslim – in reality they are nothing more than heathens) – that one or more of those square bottles are frequently being attended to …

* * * *

There is one evil here much worse than alcohol! It is opium. Oh! The misery which that disgusting substance has brought to my country, to my people, is beyond words. Opium is the plague of Java. Yes, opium is much worse than the plague. The plague does not last forever; sooner or later it subsides but the evil caused by opium is increasing rapidly, is spreading more and more and will not ever disappear simply because it is protected by the Government![14] The greater the use of opium in Java, the fuller the Treasury will be. The opium contract is one of the most profitable sources of income for the Netherlands Indies government. What does it care if the people prosper or not as a result? – the Government benefits, that is the main point. The curse of the people fills the purse of the Neth. Indies Government with thousands, with millions worth of gold.

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12 This was a Dutch version of the program that provided self-education classes for the English working class, founded and named after Arnold Toynbee (1852–83).

13 Stella was also involved in the temperance movement in Amsterdam, another typical feminist project.

14 Until 1904 the colonial government licensed Chinese opium producers. In that year it established a government-controlled Opium Administration.

Many say that the use of opium can do no harm but those who maintain this have never seen the Indies, or are blind to what is before them.

No harm! What, then, are the numerous murders, arsons, robberies which are the immediate consequence of the use of opium? No, taking opium is no evil as long as you can do it, as long as you have the money to buy the poison; but, when you cannot, when you have no money to buy it and you are an addict, then you are dangerous, then you are lost. The hunger in your belly can turn you into a thief, but the hunger for opium turns you into a murderer. There is a saying here: 'At first you consume opium but in the end opium will devour you'. And this is very, very true!

Oh God! Oh God! It is terrible to see so much evil around you and to be powerless to do anything against it. A year ago I read in one of the daily papers that the government had prohibited the sale of morphine in the opium outlets because the use of morphine would lessen the use of opium.

That wonderful, beautiful book by Mev. Goekoop![15] I enjoyed it in its entirety, three times over. I did not tire from it—with each re-reading I only came to appreciate it more. What would I not give to be allowed to live and take part in Hilda's era? Oh, if only we in the Indies had already advanced so far that a book could create such an enormous impact as *Hilda van Suylenburg* has had and continues to have in your country! Then I would not rest until *H v S* appeared in my language to do its good work, or for that matter, bad work, in the Native world. Whether good or bad, no matter; as long as it made an impression it would be good because it would be evidence that the society was stirring.

Java is still in a deep slumber. But how else could it be, if we are awake, when those who ought to be our models themselves prefer to sleep? It is a fact that the majority of European women in the Indies (I do not speak of the Dutch women who are here[16]) have little or no interest in the activities and aims of their white sisters in the Fatherland. And the most recent events in the world of Dutch women have confirmed this. What a fine contribution (!!!) the women of the Neth. Indies made to the National Exhibition of Women's Work in the Netherlands.[17] We had also received an invitation to participate, which we accepted eagerly. This great project by women had my complete

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15 Mevrouw Goekoop-De Jong van Beek en Donk, a leading feminist, was the author of the feminist novel *Hilda van Suylenburg*, published in 1897. The book was a sensation and had been reprinted five times by 1899.

16 The distinction here is between colonially born, mainly Eurasian, women and (white) women born in the Netherlands.

17 The National Exhibition of Women's Work was mounted by a coalition of Dutch feminists in 1898. It also invited contributions of exhibits of indigenous women's craft

support, we glowed with enthusiasm for the great cause, for the noble striving of those courageous women in your country, and were overjoyed that we could, were allowed to, contribute a grain of sand to the creation of a great mountain which shall and must be a blessing to women, white and brown.

We also received *prikkaarten*.[18] From my own people it was impossible to get even a single contribution for it. No matter how we explained the situation, they did not or would not understand. At our wits' end, we then simply turned to the Europeans for assistance. We sent cards and wrote letters both to ladies we knew and those we did not know, asking for support.

It was rather daring of us – we Javanese were coming to speak to Europeans about a European cause, what a conceit! It was possible that we could have been severely criticized for this, but we never considered that. We had but one thought, one goal: to serve the cause with which our hearts were entirely filled. And—we did receive a lot of support. Apparently they thought it was nice that we little Javanese asked for their help and perhaps …

But enough, they did assist us wonderfully with *prikken*; even those who had sworn they wanted to have nothing to do with the exhibition allowed themselves to be persuaded to loosen their purse strings a little. Only one lady was offended by our appeals – but we paid no attention to her. And even though, in retrospect, our participation in the Exhibition ended for us in a less than pleasant way, we nevertheless did not have a moment's regret about having participated in that work.[19]

Tell me as much as you can of the activities and aims, of the thoughts and attitudes of contemporary women in the Netherlands today. We have a lively interest in everything which concerns the Women's Movement!

Alas, I do not know any modern languages! The *adat* does not permit us girls to learn any more languages! – it is already bad enough that we know Dutch. I long with heart and soul to learn those languages, not so much in order to be able to speak them but more to be able to enjoy the many fine works by foreign writers in their original language.

It's true, isn't it, that no matter how good a translation is, it can never compare with the original? The original will always be superior, finer. We are very fond of literature; to read fine books is our greatest joy. 'We' are my younger

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from the Indies, most of which were contributed by returned European colonials. Kartini and her sisters contributed examples of batik work showing the various stages of production.

18 A *prikkaart* (pl. *prikkaarten*) was popularly used for raising money for charity. It involved a card divided into squares. One pricked a hole in the square to indicate when a contribution was made.

19 See the following letter.

sisters and I.[20] We three grew up together and are always together. In age there is only one year difference between each of us. Amongst us three there is a most harmonious relationship; naturally we occasionally have a difference of opinion but this in no way detracts from the bond that binds us sisters together. Those small disagreements are in fact quite wonderful – I mean the reconciliations that follow. It is the biggest lie in the world, don't you think, to say that two people can hold the same views on everything. It is impossible – or one must be a hypocrite.

I have not yet told you how old I am. Just last month I turned 20. Strangely, when I was 16 I thought myself so terribly old[21] and often experienced bouts of depression; and now, now that I have two crosses behind me, I feel so young and am full of life and … eager for battle.

Just call me Kartini—that is my name. We Javanese do not have family names. Kartini is both my given name and surname, and as regards the 'Raden Ajeng', those two words represent a title. When I gave Mev. van Wermeskerken[22] my address I could not just write Kartini could I? They would certainly have found that odd in Holland, and to write 'mejuffrouw' or some such in front of it, well, I am not entitled to that – I am only a Javanese.

Well, for the time being you now know enough about me, don't you? Another time I will tell you about our Native life. If you want any information concerning conditions in the Indies ask me; I am more then happy to provide you with any information about my country and people.

What I would very much like to know is – do you know Mevrouw Goekoop personally? If so, would you tell me some details about her one day. I am very interested in knowing more about this distinguished and courageous woman whom I very much admire.

You live in Amsterdam – do you know the author of *Indrukken van een Totok*?[23] Its amusing and interesting, don't you think? Many Indies people think it very much exaggerated on many counts but we do not agree. We think *Indrukken van een Totok* is certainly not exaggerated.

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20 The two sisters Kartini is referring to here are Roekmini (b. 4 July 1880), daughter of the Raden Ayu, and Kardinah (b. 1 March 1881) the next child born to Kartini's mother.

21 It was not unusual for Javanese women of her position to have been married at this age, as was her older sister.

22 Mrs van Wermeskerken-Junius, writing under a pseudonym, Johanna van Woude, had been editor of the women's periodical, *De Hollandsche Lelie* since 1887, and was a well-regarded and prolific popular writer.

23 Justus van Maurik (1846–1904). *Indrukken van een Totok* (1897) was based on the author's travels through the colony undertaken in 1896. Van Maurik was the author of numerous popular 'light' novels.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

18 August 1899

Thank you, my sincerest thanks for your wonderful long letter, for your dear, heartfelt words that warmed and inspired my heart.

Is it not possible that on further acquaintance I may disappoint you? I have already told you I know so little, I know nothing, nothing! Next to you I feel myself reduced to nothing. You are well informed about Javanese titles.

* * * *

Before you wrote to me about it, I had never given any thought to the fact that, as you say, I am of high birth. Whether I am a princess? No more than you. The last prince in our family of which we are the direct descendants in the male line is, I think, at least 25 generations ago.[24] Mama is still closely related to Madura royalty. Her great grandfather was a ruling king and her grandmother a queen. But we do not care one bit about this. For me there are only two types of aristocracy: the aristocracy of the spirit and a moral aristocracy. I think there is nothing so ridiculous, nothing sillier, than people who allow themselves to be honoured on the basis of their so-called 'high birth'. What value is attached to being a count or a baron? I cannot with my simple mind comprehend it.

'Nobility' and 'nobleness' – twin words of more or less the same sound and entirely the same meaning.[25] Poor twins, how cruel life has been to you that it almost always keeps you so ruthlessly apart!

If nobility was always what the word means, yes, then it would be an honour for me to be of high birth. But now? I still remember how angry we were last year when the ladies of The Hague at the Exhibition of Women's Work referred to us as 'the princesses of Jepara'. It seems as if in Holland one imagines that anything that comes out of the Indies that is not a 'babu' or 'spada' must be a princess or a prince.

Few of the Europeans here in the Indies call us 'Raden Ajeng' and usually address us as 'freule'. It is enough to drive me to despair. I do not know how many times I have said that we are not 'freules', still less princesses, but they

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24 The Condronegoro (old spelling Tjondronegoro), family traced their lineage back to the Majahpahit empire.

25 Kartini's play on words in the original applies equally in Englsh: the two similarly sounding words in Dutch are '*adel*' (noble), referring to aristocracy and '*edel*' (noble), referring to nobility of character.

simply do not listen to me and continue obstinately to call us 'freule'.[26] In relation to this, recently a European came here who it seemed had heard something about us, at least he asked our parents if he might be introduced to the 'princesses'. This was permitted and, oh, what fun we had!

'Regent,' he said to Pa quietly, yet in a voice distinctly audible to us – there was such disappointment in his voice – 'Princesses make me think of glittering clothing, fantastic oriental splendour, but your daughters are so ordinary.'

We could scarcely suppress a smile when we heard this. Good heavens, in his utter ignorance – in considering our clothing simple – he had given us the greatest compliment that anyone could ever give us; we often fear we are affected and vain.

Dear Stella, I am really pleased that you regard me the same way as your Dutch friends and that you will treat me accordingly, and that I am your kindred spirit. I want nothing else than that you always call me by my name and that you use 'je' and 'jij'.[27] You can see how well I have followed your example. Should you find somewhere in my letters an occasional 'gij' and 'u' then do not regard this as a formality but merely as a mistake.

I also am an enemy of formality. What do I care about forms? I am happy to be able at last to shake off that annoying Javanese formality while having this chat with you on paper. These forms, these petty laws instituted by people, are an abomination to me. You cannot imagine how that old mother 'etiquette' rules in the circles of the Javanese nobility. You cannot move a muscle or that awful woman stares grimly at you! With us these formalities are not so strictly followed.

We honour the golden proverb: freedom is happiness.

Amongst us, beginning with me, we ignore all the forms, we let our own feelings tell us how far our liberal tendencies can go. It is really terrible, these conventions amongst us Javanese.

Europeans who have been in the Indies for years and years and who have had much contact with Native leaders have great difficulty making sense of Javanese etiquette if they have not made a special study of it. Often I have had to explain it all to my friends, but then, after talking myself hoarse for an hour, they would still know no more about our conventions than a newborn baby.

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26 'Freule' was the term of address for unmarried Dutch 'ladies' of high social or aristocratic birth. The term was, therefore, more or less synonymous with Raden Ajeng, the honorific applied to unmarried women of the Javanese nobility.

27 The Dutch words denote the informal 'you'. A little later she contrasts the Dutch formal forms of you: 'gij' and 'u'.

To give you just an idea of how difficult our etiquette is, I will give you a few examples. A younger sister or brother of mine may not pass by me except by crawling over the ground. Should a sister be sitting on a stool and I pass her, then she must immediately slide onto the floor and stay there with bowed head until I am completely out of view. My younger brothers and sisters may not use the informal form of you and may only address me in high Javanese; and, after each complete sentence which falls from their lips, they must make me a sembah, that is, put both hands together and bring them up to just under the nose.

If my sisters and brothers speak about me to other people then they must use high Javanese for everything that relates to me such as, for instance, my clothes, my chair, my hands, feet, eyes, everything that is mine. They are strictly forbidden to touch my honourable head and may only do so with my express permission and after having made several sembahs. Should there be something nice on the table the little ones must not touch it until it suits me to try some.

Oh, you would shudder if you entered the household of a typical high-ranking Native family. One may only speak to one's superiors so softly that only those beside you can hear it. If a young lady should laugh, then, oh goodness me, she must not open her mouth. ('Good heavens!' I can hear you exclaim.) Yes, Stella, you will hear more strange things if you want to know everything about us Javanese.

If a young girl is walking, she has to do this sedately, with short, neat steps, as slowly as a snail; if you walk a little more quickly then they accuse you of being a galloping horse.

But now, enough, don't you find all this terribly interesting? Towards my older brothers and sisters I follow all the formalities scrupulously, I will deprive no one of their entitlements; but, commencing with me, we are having nothing more to do with conventional forms. Liberty, equality and fraternity! The younger sisters and brothers with me and amongst themselves conduct themselves as free and equal friends. The sisters say 'jij' and 'jou' and speak the same language as me.[28] At first people hated the free and easy relationship between the younger brothers and sisters amongst themselves; we were called 'children without a proper upbringing' and I was a 'kuda kore', a wild horse, because I rarely walked but constantly jumped and skipped about. And why

[28] Kartini uses Dutch pronouns by way of illustration. As she makes clear later, rather than reverting to high Javanese, or *kromo*, as they should have done when speaking to their older sister, Kartini had insisted her younger sisters use *ngoko*, the form of language used between equals when speaking with her, thus 'the same language'.

else did they scold me? Because I often laughed out loud and unashamedly (!!!) bared my teeth. But now that they see how close and pleasant the relationship amongst us is, now that old Mother Etiquette has fled before our sense of freedom, people envy our harmonious unity which is so evident amongst us three.

Oh, Stella, you should see how brothers and sisters live alongside each other in other *kabupatens*! They are brothers and sisters only because they are the children of the same parents, no other bond keeps them together than blood ties. There are sisters living alongside each other who, apart from the family resemblances in their faces, have nothing in common that you can see.

Thank you, dear Stella, for your lovely compliment with which I am childishly delighted. I love your language so much and since my schooldays it has been my most fervent wish to really get to know it properly. I am still so far from realizing my heart's desire but your flattering compliment suggests that I have come a step closer. You cannot do any more damage. I am already spoiled to death at home and by my friends.

Oh, Stella, I thank you so much for the kind thoughts you have about us Javanese. For that matter, I would not have expected anything other than that; for you, all people, white or brown, are equal.[29] From truly cultured, educated people we have never experienced anything but goodwill. No matter how stupid, ignorant or uneducated a Javanese may be, the class of people to whom you belong will always see in them fellow human beings, whom God has created just as he has created civilized people. You see people who possess a heart and are sensitive to what is done to them, even though their faces may remain expressionless with neither a look nor a gesture revealing their inner feelings.[30] If the extract from *Hilda van Suylenburg* you sent me won over my regard for you and your first letter increased the warm feelings I had towards you, your last letter has secured for you a lasting place in my heart.

At home we speak to each other in Javanese, we only speak Dutch with Dutch people. Occasionally we might speak a short sentence to each other in Dutch if, for instance, it is something amusing which cannot be translated without losing its humour.

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29 Presumably this was a reference to Stella's commitment to socialism.

30 As a sign of refined manners, Javanese etiquette requires that one does not give public expression to strong emotions.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

6 November 1899

Oh certainly, Stella, I can never be sufficiently grateful to my parents for the liberal education they have given me. I would rather have had to experience struggle and hardship for the rest of my life than not to have had the benefit of everything my European upbringing has provided me. I know that so many battles await me but I face the future unconcerned. I cannot return to my old environment. But it is also not possible for me to proceed further in the new direction. There are still thousands of ties that hold me fast to the old world.

What will happen, all my European friends ask themselves. If only I knew myself, dear people, I would tell you with pleasure. They all know and understand what a precarious position we find ourselves in, and then they say it was wrong of my Father to have given me the education I received. No! No! Do not cast the blame on my dear Father! No, and once more, no! Father could not help, could not foresee that the education which Father gave to all his children should have had such an effect in the case of one of them. Many other regents have or are giving their brood the same education as we had, and it has had or is having no other effect than that of producing Dutch-speaking young Native ladies with European manners.[31] In the case of many European women who have received a European education, the effect has been no more than this.[32] 'What will be the result of all this?' everyone who has met us asks Mevrouw Ovink-Soer.[33] Everyone knows and understands that sooner or later we must return to the society in which we can no longer feel content.

Nothing can be done about it; one fine day it will happen, must happen, that I will follow along behind an unknown husband. Love is a fairytale in our Javanese world. How can husband and wife love each other if they only see each other for the first time when they are already well and truly bound in marriage?

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While the moral condition of the young men remains at the level it is now, I consider it a great blessing that tradition has kept us isolated from them. One can find cultured, very cultured Javanese by the score but culture and

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31 In numerous later letters Kartini critically details the superficial use and impact of European education amongst both Javanese men and women of the nobility for 'show'.

32 Kartini is referring to Eurasian women legally classified as European.

33 Marie Ovink-Soer, wife of the assistant resident of Jepara was Kartini's long time 'mentor' after she left school.

education are not yet excuses for immorality. Seek and request anything from the Native aristocratic male world but not this – morality – because you will search in vain.

Oh God, Oh God, I shudder and shiver at the thought that one day it will and must happen that I will be bound to such a person.

I hate, I despise them all, married or unmarried; there is not one for whom I have some regard, all of them I reject.

I will never, never be able to love. In my opinion, to be able to love, there must be respect, and I cannot have respect for Javanese young men. How can I respect someone who is married and is a father and yet, because he has had enough of the mother of his children, nevertheless asks another woman into his house and, according to Muslim law, is then legally married to her? And who does not do this? And why would they not do so? It is no crime, nor is it a scandal; Islamic law allows men to have four wives at once. Even if a thousand times over it was not a crime in terms of Islamic law and learning, I would forever call it a sin. I regard as a sin all deeds which cause one's fellow human beings to suffer. To sin is to hurt another being, human or animal. And can you imagine what hellish pain a woman must experience when her husband comes home with another whom she has to recognize as his lawful wife, her rival? He can torment her to death, mistreat her as much as he likes for as long as he chooses not to give her back her freedom, she can whistle in the wind for her rights! Everything for the man and nothing for the woman is our law and general belief.

'*Noblesse oblige*' you say in your last letter. Foolish me to think that spiritual nobility constantly goes hand in hand with nobility of character! That social elevation also means moral superiority! How bitterly disappointed I was in this. Can you now understand the utter disgust I have for marriage? I would undertake the most humble work with love and gratitude if it saved me from that and made me independent. But I am allowed to do nothing because of Father's social position.

Were I to choose an occupation it would have to be something which was fitting! Work which we would like to do, and which would not shame my most noble and high-placed family (a string of regents from the Oosthoek to central Java[34]), is so far beyond our reach! It would require a lengthy stay in the West and for that we do not have the means. We have set our sights too high and now we must suffer the consequences. Why then did God give us talents if all

[34] Kartini's family, the Condronegoro, occupied powerful positions throughout the north central region of Java. The 'Oosthoek' was the term introduced during the VOC era for the coastal region beyond Semarang.

the means to develop them are lacking? Both my sisters have become quite proficient at drawing and painting without any training, according to experts – and they would dearly love to develop their skills further. No opportunity exists for this in Java and we are not able to go to Europe.[35] To do something like that, one needs the permission of His Exc. the Minister of Finances and His Exc. does not give such permission. So we shall have to proceed on our own.

Oh, Stella, can you imagine what it is like to want something terribly and to recognize yourself powerless to achieve it! I have no doubt that if he were able to, Father would not have hesitated to send us to your cold and far-off country. I can also paint and draw but the pen attracts me infinitely more than the paintbrush. Do you now see why I so long to master your beautiful language? No, do not try to fool me. I feel my inadequacy only too clearly. If I had full command of the Dutch language then my future would be guaranteed. A large field of endeavour would then lie before me and I would then be a free person, because, as a Native Javanese, I know everything about Native life. No matter how long a European has lived here, unacquainted with the circumstances of Native life, he would never be able to fully understand our Native society as a Native person. Much of what is now unknown and mysterious for Europeans I could easily explain in a few words. Where a European cannot go, a Native can. All kinds of details, which remain unknown even to an Indologist,[36] a Native person can shed light on.

I feel my inadequacy only too well, Stella. Everyone would burst out laughing if they could look over my shoulder and read this. What a crazy idea of mine, surely, that I, who have learnt nothing, know nothing, that I could want to attempt to study literature! And yet, even if you also ridiculed me (and I know that you would not), I will never let go of this dream. It is maybe a rather hopeless project but 'he who dares not, gains not' is my favourite saying. Onwards! Just boldly venture forth and seize hold of it! Three quarters of the world belongs to those who dare.

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35 This is the first reference to her ambition to study in Europe, the *leitmotif* of the subsequent correspondence.

36 The university qualification for Dutch colonial officials was a degree in 'Indology', taught largely by professors of *Volkenkunde* (Ethnology) and Philology. It entailed a study of colonial and Dutch law, languages including Malay, Javanese and Arabic, and ethnography. Much of Kartini's correspondence reflects her aim to educate the Dutch people on the nature of Javanese society and culture.

I sent you the piece from *Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*.[37] I wrote it about four years ago and did not look at it again until just recently when I was tidying up some old papers and came across it again. Father had just received a request for assistance from the administration of that organization. Pa sent the piece in and some time later I was sent a bundle of reprints. I thought it was something you may have been interested in so I sent you a copy.

An article concerning the making of batik, that I prepared last year for the Exhibition of Women's Work and about which I never heard anything, will be incorporated in a reference work on batik that will appear shortly.[38] It was rather nice when I received that unexpected news recently. I had forgotten the whole matter.

You asked me how it was that I came to find myself surrounded by four thick walls. You no doubt thought it was a cell or something like that. No, Stella, my gaol was a large house with an extensive garden, but nevertheless surrounded by high walls that kept me imprisoned. No matter how large our house and how extensive the garden, if you are forced to stay there it does become confining. I remember how, in utter desperation, I would often throw myself against the constantly locked doors and the cold stone walls. Whichever direction I happened to take, at the end of each walk there was a stone wall or a locked door. After the coronation of our Queen, the door of our prison remained open; however, that great event had long been prepared for. European friends had for years already been banging and hammering at the stout walls that enclosed us. At first they resisted but a constant drip does hollow out the stone. And pebble by pebble, the walls began to crumble until, with the coronation celebrations, our Parents in one leap dragged us from the ruins and into God's open, free fields![39]

Lately Mevrouw Ovink has been saying to me: 'Child, child, have we done the right thing in dragging you out from behind the kabupaten walls? Would it not have been better had you three remained in the kabupaten? Because

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37 The article, entitled 'Het Huwelijk bij de Kodjas' (Marriage amongst the Kodja), was published in the leading Dutch academic journal *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 1899. (See Part Four below.). The journal did not name Kartini as author, indicating only that the article was submitted by the Regent of Jepara.

38 The information (as well as photographs and samples) Kartini provided to the Tentoonstelling was later given to GP Rouffaer and HH Juynboll and later published in their *De Batik-Kunst in Nederlandsch-Indië en haar Geschiedenis* (1914). It was not included in their earlier 1899 volume on batik. Kartini's account and the assistance of her brother Sosrokartono, were expansively acknowledged.

39 Thereafter she and her sisters were regular visitors in the home of the Marie Ovink-Soer, wife of the assistant resident of Jepara.

what will happen now? What will the future bring?' And when she saw our paintings and drawings she would cry out in desperation: 'Children, children, is there nothing else for you but this?'

No, nothing; the only effective solution that I think of is that we three fly into the air and that Ma and Pa forget that they ever had us. It is fortunate that I am optimistic by nature and do not give up too easily. Well, if I cannot become what I want to be, then I will just be a kitchen maid. You must know that I am a 'genius' at cooking. My family and friends need not be concerned about my future, wouldn't you agree? A good kitchen maid is always in demand and can get a position anywhere.[40]

How small salaries are in Holland in comparison with those in the Indies! And here they are always complaining about low salaries. In the Indies you are entitled to a pension after twenty years and clergy already after ten years. The Indies is certainly an 'Eldorado' for civil servants, is it not? And yet, most Dutch people curse the Indies as that 'horrible monkey land'. It can make me so mad when I hear people say, 'that miserable Indies'.

People forget all too easily that this 'miserable monkey land' fills many empty pockets with gold by the time they return to *Patria* after spending some time here.

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It would simply be a useless exercise to translate *Hilda van Suylenburg* into Malay. Who can read that language except men?[41] There are so few women capable of reading Malay. And, for *H v S* to become influential they would first have to be prepared for it. They would simply regard it as a pretty story and nothing more.

Change will come to our entire Native society; the turning point has been preordained – but when? That is the big question. We cannot advance the hour of the revolution. Why should it just happen to be us, we who live in this wilderness, deep in this remote hinterland behind which no other lands lie, who should have such revolutionary ideas? My friends here say that we would be wise if we were to go to sleep for 100 years or so – when we woke then it

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40 This can be read as an ironic reference to the possibility of Kartini becoming a servant in a colonial household. However in her 1958 memoir, Kardinah writes that Kartini was noted for her cooking, and even wrote a cookbook that included both Javanese and Dutch dishes.

41 Increasing numbers of Javanese men employed in the colonial civil service or European businesses were graduates of government Native elementary schools where Malay, the language of the colonial bureaucracy, was taught.

would be the right time for us. Java would then have progressed to where we would like it to be.

I own the book *Maatschappelijk werk in Indië*. I received it from Father, who in turn received it as a present from Mevrouw van Zuylen-Tromp.[42] This lady had sent it to Father with a request for his comments and also for his cooperation. She wanted to publish a book about Native women. I refused. I do have much to say about Javanese women but I am still so young and still have very little, so very little, experience of life. The topic that I had to address was too serious for me and too sacred just to dash something off. I could have written this piece if I had wanted to but I know I would have regretted it if I had. Why? Because in about four years time I will have a better and clearer view of everything and I would perhaps have a better grasp of the many ideas that are now swirling through my brain.

I cannot tell you about Islamic teachings, Stella. Its followers are forbidden to discuss them with those of another faith. And, to be honest, I am a Muslim only because my ancestors were. How can I love my teachings if I do not know them, may not know them? The Koran is too holy to be translated, no matter what the language. Here nobody knows Arabic. People here are taught to read from the Koran but what is read is not understood. I think it is ridiculous – teaching someone to read without understanding what is read. It is as though you taught me to read an English book completely by heart without explaining a single word to me. If I am to know and comprehend my religious teachings then I would have to go to Arabia to learn the language there. But even without being religious you can still be a good person, can't you, Stella?[43] And the essential point is being a good person.

Religion is intended to be a blessing for mankind, to form a bond between all God's creatures. We are all brothers and sisters not because we have the same human ancestry but because we are all children of one Father, of Him who rules the heavens above. Oh God, sometimes I wish that religion never existed. Because it is this, which should unite all people, which has throughout the centuries been the cause of conflict and division, of the bloodiest and most gruesome scenes of murder. People born of the same parents threaten

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42 Nellie van Zuylen-Tromp was the founder in 1898 of Oost en West, an association for the promotion of Native arts, established following the exhibition of Indonesian arts at the Nationale Tentoonstelling in the Hague in that year. It later organized regular exhibitions and sales of Indonesian arts and crafts and appointed Kartini as their agent in Jepara. The publication mentioned was a collection of papers presented in conjunction with the women's exhibition regarding the possible role for women in the colony.

43 In her 1958 memoir Kardinah notes that the sisters were given Qu'ranic instruction twice a week by a '*santri* lady', that is, a female Qu'ranic scholar.

each other because they differ in the way they worship the one and the same God. People bound together by the most tender thoughts turn away from each other in deep sorrow. Differences between churches in which surely the same God is appealed to, creates a wall between the two hearts which beat for each other.[44]

Is religion indeed a blessing for people, I often ask myself doubtfully? How many sins are not committed in the name of religion, the very thing that ought to serve to save us from sin?

I have *Max Havelaar* but I do not know *Wijs Mij de Plaats Waar Gij Gezaaid Hebt*. I shall enquire about it because I am very, very fond of Multatuli.[45]

I will tell you on some other occasion about the condition of the people and their leaders. I have already written so much and that subject certainly demands some space!

What language do we speak at home? What a question, Stella dear. Of course, our own language, and that is Javanese. We speak Malay with foreign orientals who are Malays, Moors, Arabs, Chinese etc., and Dutch only with Europeans.[46]

Oh Stella, how I had to laugh when I read your question: 'Can I embrace my parents without their permission?' Listen, I have yet to give my parents, brothers and sisters a kiss. Kissing is not customary in the Javanese world. Only little children from one year to the age of 3, 4, 5, 6 are kissed. We never kiss each other. Yes, that may surprise you! But it is in fact the case. Only our Dutch women friends kiss us and we kiss them back. And even that began only quite recently. At first we just allowed ourselves to be kissed, but never returned their kiss. Since we became friends with Mevrouw Ovink-Soer we have learnt to kiss. When she kissed us, Her Ladyship asked us to kiss her back. In the beginning we thought it rather strange and kissed very weakly. But you get to learn that skill very quickly, don't you? No matter how fond I was of someone (a Dutch person of course, we Javanese never kiss each other), it would never enter my head to volunteer to be the one to kiss first. Because, you see, I would not know if she would like this. For us it is a joy to brush a

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44 See later correspondence (1902) in which Kartini extends this discussion on religion.

45 E Douwes Dekker (pseudonym Multatuli) agitated for colonial reform through his literary works. His most famous book, *Max Havelaar* (1860), was being regularly reprinted and widely read by a new generation of Javanese school graduates and 'progressive' colonial officials at the end of the century. See further Kartini's letter to Stella 13 January 1900 below.

46 'Foreign oriental' was one of three legal classifications used in colonial law to define Chinese, Arab and Indian residents. Kartini's (incorrect) inclusion of 'Malays' in this category, presumably a reference to Sumatrans, provides some indication of the boundaries of Kartini's 'nationalist' horizon.

soft pale cheek with our lips, but whether the owner of that cheek also likes the feel of a dirty black face against her is another question.[47] I don't care if people might regard us as unfeeling but of our own volition we would never embrace someone.

* * * *

If it is true what you say, that we compare well with the majority of Dutch girls, then this is chiefly the work of Mevrouw Ovink who involved herself with us Javanese girls as if we were her sisters. The relations with this cultured and highly educated pure-blood Dutch lady had a beneficial influence on us brown girls. Moesje knows well that for all time and across all distance, the hearts of her daughters will belong to them both.[48]

Our Father had promised, or rather Mevrouw Ovink made Father promise on his word of honour, to bring us to them in Jombang.[49] Mijnheer Ovink wanted to take us straight away. We love them so much, almost as much as Pa and Ma. We miss them very, very much. I still cannot fully accept that they have left us. We have experienced so much together. We shared each other's family life for so long.

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer[50]

November 1899

Oh dearest, dearest Mevrouwtje, we had a most enjoyable Sunday morning the day before yesterday.

Pa had taken my little brother on a brief tour and after a while returned home. The little boy then told us, full of excitement: 'Oh Sis, there is a warship lying at anchor. The pasar is full of sailors and two of them have come back with us. Quick, come and have a look, they are out the front with Pa now.'

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47 This is a typical example of how Kartini can be ironic in her reference to racist colonial attitudes. At other times she can also be highly critical or bitter.

48 Kartini's description of Ovink as 'pure-blood' highlights contemporary distinction between settler Europeans, largely of mixed European and Indonesian parentage, and 'white' Europeans and those recently arrived from the Netherlands, typically referred to as 'totoks'.

49 In 1899 Ovink was appointed assistant resident in Jombang, East Java.

50 Having been able to visit her on a daily basis in Jepara, Kartini may not previously have written extensive letters to the 40 year old Mevrouw Ovink-Soer. The content and style of this letter may perhaps be reminiscent of the conversations that she may have had with Marie Ovink on such visits.

At the mention of a warship we jumped up as though stung by a bee and even before our brother had finished speaking we had already flown out of the room to the front of the house. There we saw two gentlemen dressed in white walking hesitantly towards the house. After a while we saw them sitting with Pa on the middle gallery. A little later still a boy came to tell us that we had to come to sit with Pa which we were only too happy to do. In a flash we donned a fresh kebaya and moments later we were already ensconced in rocking chairs and deep in conversation – with two officers from the 'Edie'. I don't know how it happened but we were immediately at ease and spoke with the gentlemen as if we had known them for years.

But how was it that the two had happened to be there in the Kabupaten? That I will now tell you. Pa had gone out, as I already mentioned above, on a brief tour of the neighbourhood and along the way met about five gentlemen. Three went in a different direction but two followed Pa's carriage to the Kabupaten. They thought (these gentlemen had never been to Java before) that the road taken by the carriage was just an ordinary street and that our house was a warehouse or something like that.

Pa sent someone to the gentlemen to ask them to come inside. They were of course shocked when they realized the mistake they had made in following someone to his own home. What should they do? They didn't like this at all because they didn't know our language and could only speak some broken Malay. Papa ended their hesitation by going up to meet them and speaking to them in their own language. The gentlemen were amazed and surprised. Now they were very keen to come into the Kabupaten. It appeared that one of the gentlemen was a relative of someone that Pa knew very well.

I can't remember ever having felt so at ease with a complete stranger. I didn't give it a moment's thought that I had never seen these people before in my life and that five minutes earlier I hadn't even known they existed. It's strange but it is a fact that we have always felt at ease with seafarers. We have, after all, lost our hearts to the sea; everything related to it interests us. You know how totally happy we were when there was mention of a boat trip. We glow at the thought of the sea, you know that yourself; when I was lying there half dead in the opium prauw I still liked the fact that I was lying there on the waves. Already as a child I was in love with the heavenly sea. Had I been a boy I would not have hesitated for a moment, I would have become a sailor immediately.

Imagine what Pa told the gentlemen: 'My daughters love sailing very much and would very much like to go on board.' That dear, dear Pa of ours! Pa knows everything that is in our heart. He doesn't actually say this but I am sure of it.

Every now and then Pa tells other people something about us that expresses exactly what we think even though we have kept it to ourselves. At such times we are completely amazed how Pa could have known this – something we have thought about but had not revealed to others. It must be because Pa loves us so much, and we him. Now and then Pa surprises us by uncovering a thought that lies at the bottom of my heart, the existence of which I thought nobody knew except myself. Is that what is called being a kindred spirit? If I were a little more superstitious I would really think that Pa was a mind reader.

But I was going to tell you about our nice Sunday morning and not about the secret telephone cable that runs from our heart to that of my dearest father.

The officers thought it a terrible pity that the 'Edie' would not be much longer at anchor as otherwise they would have liked to invite us on board. The task of the 'Edie' was to identify reefs in Karimun Jawa[51] and should actually not have been here except that the captain who has an impressive sounding name – Baron van A, what do you think of that Mevrouwtje? – thought it would be nice to see Jepara. Both officers would do what they could to convince the captain, before the 'Edie' leaves for Surabaya coming Monday, to spend Saturday and Sunday at Jepara. Should they succeed, and should therefore the 'Edie' come here again next Saturday, they would let us know by firing one of the ship's guns. I have no illusions that they will succeed but it would be so nice if the boat returned. I told the gentlemen that, should they pass Jepara again, they should break a propeller shaft or something so that the ship would be obliged to stay put in our harbour. And it was so nice: we told them about the 'Borneo' and Mr A asked if we knew van der B. and, oh, when we said we did, he said that v.d.B. was a special friend of his and he of him.

When the officers had left and we were back in our room, we thought it had all been a dream. And really, it was as if we had dreamt it. It was so sudden, so unexpectedly did they appear only to then disappear as rapidly. But it was a most pleasant surprise, don't you think? I still have to laugh about it when I think about that funny adventure.

Oh Moedertje, mevrouwtjemijn, I wish you would come back. Your daughters miss you so much. We long for those cosy days spent with you. Those wonderful hours in your dear sitting room where you so often allowed us to enjoy so much interesting reading matter, where we discussed so many

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51 These are a group of islands lying off the coast north of Jepara. Kartini published a fictionalized account of such a visit in *De Echo* in 1900: 'Een Oorlogsschip op de Ree' (A Warship at Anchor). (See Part Three below.) Persons referred to here could not be identified.

things that will remain known only to us. I miss those confidential discussions with you when I revealed to my dear Moedertje all those thoughts that tossed about in my rebellious head and the feelings in my restless heart. If I was feeling depressed I had only to see your cheerful face and I would become a cheerful, carefree child again who could sing in gay abandon: 'Even should the heavens fall I would simply set my shoulder underneath.'[52]

Mevrouwtje, you spoiled us too much, indulged us too much! Now we do nothing but long again for those wonderful times when we were together. And yet, although we long for you so much, we fervently hope that our trip to Jombang will be postponed for as long as possible. Why? Because we know, we feel, that in Jombang will be the last time that we will see each other. When we see each other again it will also be a final farewell. You will never come to Jepara again, and to just pop over to visit you will be impossible for us. For this reason let us hope that that journey can be postponed for as long as possible. It is wonderful to have something to look forward to; we want to savour the prospect of that moment for as long as possible. Then there will be that moment when we see each other again and then – the end of that. No, not really the end: we will retain the memories.

We are neither as good or as nice as you seem to think. You know, dear Moedertje, that is it nothing more than egotism that once in a while drives us to do good and to be nice? Because oh, there is nothing better I think than to call up a happy smile on someone else's face, especially of someone we love. There is nothing more heavenly than when a pair of beloved eyes look at you with love and joy and when you feel guilty on account of all the happiness you feel.

How nice that kokki also remembers us.

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[52] This line is from a popular nineteenth century heroic Dutch ballad.

LETTERS 1900

Introduction

The year 1900 marks the beginning of Kartini's significant relationship with Jacques and Rosa Abendanon. This connection enabled her to have a direct link to the highest levels of colonial government. In comparing her letters to her long-time friend, Marie Soer, with those to her new friend, Rosa, it is clear that both the latter's personality and social position are important ingredients to this new relationship. Rosa also provided Kartini with a 'replacement' for Marie Soer as a source of encouragement, comfort and of confirmation for her feminist ideals. The connection, which began in August, is the beginning of a new rush of correspondence reminiscent of her enthusiastic spate of long letters to Stella the previous year. Given the delays occasioned by the relative isolation of Jepara, this correspondence is maintained at a remarkably regular rate that averages close to one letter a fortnight over the following three years![1]

The meeting with Rosa was, in a sense, fortuitous. Rosa had accompanied her husband, the Director of Native Education, on his official visit to the Regent of Jepara as part of his effort to gain support for his plan to establish schools for girls from prominent Javanese families. Well before the declaration of the so-called ethical policy by the Dutch queen at the opening of the Dutch parliament the following year, Abendanon had commenced initiating educational reforms for which incoming governor general, Willem Rooseboom (1899–1904) provided him with little support (Miert 1991). Schools for well-born native girls he believed would be essential to prepare them as wives for a new generation of indigenous leaders who would implement a gradual process of modernization and development in Java. A society could not advance, he had proclaimed, if its women were not educated.

The account of the first meeting with Rosa (a full description of which she wrote a year later and is included elsewhere in this volume) is usually identified as beginning Kartini's path to becoming a classroom teacher. However, at the time of this visit Kartini had already developed ideas about, if not clear plans for, her future: to study in the Netherlands to prepare herself to one day

[1] This computation includes occasional postcards and is based on the complete archive of Kartini letters to Rosa.

contribute to the education of her people and, in particular, to promote and contribute to the education for women. The meeting with the colonial director of education and his wife created a diversion in the trajectory of this life plan, although the meeting may have provided a timely alternative pathway. Several months previously Kartini had revealed to Marie Ovink-Soer that arrangements were in hand for her to travel to Europe, a plan that the wife of the former governor general, Asch van Wyck, was personally sponsoring in consultation with Kartini's brother, Sosrokartono. The director and his wife were kept ignorant of the fact.[2] Abendanon interpreted Kartini's enthusiasm for education as a desire to become a local classroom teacher, which precisely fitted his plans for establishing a school for Javanese women but his suggestions, as reported by Kartini, implied a significant contraction of the broader vision she had in mind.

As a result of this meeting, Abendanon believed his plan to establish a girls' school had now come a step closer, and he subsequently reported to the governor general that:

> The Regent of Jepara, Raden Mas Adiparti Ario Sasraningrat, being of the view to give his children not only a higher education but also to prepare them to undertake useful work in society, informed me of his desire to see his daughters Raden Ajeng Kartini, Raden Ajeng Roekmini and Raden Ajeng Kardinah prepared to take the examination for teachers for the elementary school for Europeans.

In his memorandum he continued to describe this initiative of the Regent in glowing terms and expressed the view that

> Should the above mentioned girls achieve their goal, which, given the level of general education they have already achieved is most likely, then, should the plan to establish elementary schools for native girls eventuate, they would be eligible to be appointed to them or otherwise to one or other similar private school which is sure to be opened, where they would be able to exert an important influence on the development of native girls. (Directeur van Onderwijs, Eeredienst en Nijverheid to the Governor General, Batavia 19 March 1901 (KITLV Archive 13, No. H897, 35)).

As a first step he urged the appointment at government expense of a teacher with headmistress qualifications to the European elementary school in Jepara

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[2] Readers of Kartini's letters also remained unaware of this fact since the relevant sections in the letter to Marie Ovink-Soer had been excised from the 1911 publication.

who, in return for a special allowance, could prepare the three girls to sit the teacher certificate examinations. Although Abendanon's broader plan for a trial government native girls' school was refused, as the correspondence the following year reveals, Abendanon did manage to have a junior female teacher, Anneke Glaser, appointed to the Jepara school. Upon arrival 'Annie' was accommodated in the kabupaten and the two women apparently became close friends.[3] Annie did provide Kartini with initial tuition in the prescribed course of studies, including modern European languages, in preparation for the teacher certificate examination, apparently in her own time.

Thus, the August 1900 meeting and its consolidation later that month by a visit to Batavia, set Kartini on a path that largely defines the remaining narrative. Although, in the end, the means for Kartini to study in the Netherlands did eventuate, until her case was taken up by Henri van Kol, none of the various plans for this appeared as concrete as that which Abendanon was putting in train. As Kartini explains to Stella (23 August 1900), just before meeting the Abendanons she had heard that the plan she had described at the beginning of the year to Marie Ovink-Soer had faltered. So indeed, the Abendanon visit, which also resulted in convincing her father to give approval, was an important milestone in the realisation of Kartini dreams. Nevertheless, it was of a lower order than she had imagined and it is then significant to note that Kartini's hopes to study in Europe, and planning to bring this about, continued, if anything with increasing intensity in the subsequent two years. Despite the many changes and set backs, this becomes an on-going background theme to the subsequent correspondence

The initial flow of letters to Rosa is disrupted by another exciting event – Kartini's journey to and from the colonial capital to visit the Abendanons at their invitation. This visit is recorded in Kartini's letters but can also be appreciated from the point of view of her dinner companion reported in the introduction to this volume.

Of the remaining letters written in this year, those to Marie Ovink-Soer in November mark the departure of her mentor from Java. The first, the undated (reconstituted) letter which appears to have been written at the beginning of the year, as mentioned above, is of particular significance in revealing that Kartini had independently been making arrangements to study in the Netherlands – it seems even Marie had not known of this. Abendanon's suggestion of an alternative encouraged Kartini to at last broach her plans with her father, plans

[3] Anneke refused permission for her letters from Kartini to be published. Kartini's sisters' letters to Annie have recently been recovered.

that must have been initiated the previous year when her correspondence with Stella commenced.

Of the two letters to Stella in 1900 the first, in January, in a sense completes the sequence of letters in which Kartini had detailed to her what amounts to a critical report on colonial policy and practice. Thereafter, if it can be assumed that Stella provided Abendanon with all the letters she had received from Kartini in that year, one gets the impression that Stella had now been set aside in favour of Rosa Abendanon. Her second letter to Stella after a gap of almost eight months and the occasional letters thereafter largely concern reports of her relationship with her new friends, the Abendanons.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

13 January 1900

To go to Europe! Until my dying breath that will remain my ideal. If only I could make myself small enough to be able to crawl inside an envelope then I would come to you, Stella, with this letter, to my dear brother and to … Hush! Not another word!

It is not my fault, Stella, if from time to time I write nonsense. The glass gamelan in the pendopo could tell you more about it than I. They are playing our favourite song. It is not a song, not a melody really, simply sounds and tones, so tender, so soft – fluttering whimsically, drifting purposelessly, entangled together in the air; but at the same time how arresting, how moving and beautiful it is! No, no they are not the sounds of glass, of brass, of wood that emanate from it: they are the voices of human souls speaking to us; sometimes complaining, sometimes weeping and – very occasionally – happily laughing. And my soul is swept upwards, along with those murmuring, pure silver tones, in that rarefied blue sky towards the fluffy clouds, towards the glittering stars – deep bass sounds rise up, and those sounds carry me along through dark valleys, deep ravines, through sombre forests, impenetrable wildernesses! And my soul trembles and contracts with fear and pain and grief!

I have heard 'Ginonjing'[4] a thousand times yet I cannot reproduce a single note. Now that the gamelan is silent, I can no longer remember a single sound, everything has been swept from my memory; those sorrowful sounds which make me so utterly happy yet at the same time so melancholy. I cannot hear 'Ginonjing' without being deeply moved. I only need to hear the first notes of

[4] Ginonjing refers to a particular Javanese musical piece performed by Javanese gamelan orchestra.

the beautiful introduction and I am under its spell. I do not want to hear that heartbreaking song and yet I have to, I must, I must listen to the murmuring voices which tell me of the past, of the future, and it is as if the breath of these trembling silver notes blows away the veil which conceals the mysterious future. And, as clear as the day, images of the future pass before my mind's eye. A shiver passes through my being when I see sombre, dark figures arise before me. I do not want to look but my eyes remain wide open and at my feet yawns an abyss of dizzying depth; but, if I glance upwards, a clear blue sky arches above me and golden rays of sunshine frolic with the little fluffy clouds and my heart is light once more!

There, are you convinced now what a foolish, nonsensical creature I am? What a lot of nonsense I have heaped together once again, eh? But now, enough, I shall try to speak sensibly, as a normal person: foolish, over-sensitive individuals we will ban from our company, won't we, Stella?

My sunny land, which you long for so much, has been anything but sunny during the last few days. There have been terrible rainstorms every day, and last Sunday the Jepara River overflowed its banks, flooding many villages and the town itself with its red-brown waters.

And this morning it really stormed, it was terrible how the wind took charge here. In our yard, several trees were completely blown bare, thick branches broke off as if they were matchsticks and there are only a few bare grey trunks left of the beautiful koolblanda tree. How terribly the kampongs must have suffered. Whole roofs were blown off houses. Pa is on a tour of inspection today; once again several houses in an isolated district of Pa's region are underwater. Lately Pa has been very busy; one day it is because of a *banjir,* then an earthquake, then once again a storm. A colossal randu tree fell over recently on a public road and two passers-by were dragged out from under it, totally crushed. All day and night we heard the sea roar and rage. Poor 'Klein Scheveningen',[5] the storm raged there terribly. The roadway to the bathhouse has been totally destroyed by the waves and the beach in front of it has disappeared. The ravenous sea has swallowed it up. This afternoon, if it does not rain too heavily, I will ask Pa to go there.

We were at Klein Scheveningen a week ago: the three of us were standing on a large rock looking at the furious play of the waves. We were so entranced by the awesome spectacle that we did not even notice that those mighty incoming waves were coming ever closer to our rock. It was only when the

[5] This was a nearby beach that Kartini and Marie Ovink-Soer had named after the popular seaside resort of Scheveningen near the Dutch capital, The Hague.

little ones on the beach anxiously called to us to come back did we realize that we had become completely encircled by the foaming water. We returned to the children on the shore wet up to our knees.

Some time ago you asked me about the conditions of the 'little people' these days but, as I had already written so much at the time, I ignored the question since it cannot be answered in a few words. I had promised you, however, to come back to it on another occasion and that is actually the reason for my writing this time. But before I touch on this subject, I would like to respond to the rest of your last letter.

Thank you, Stella, for your encouragement. I hope that what you affirm will be realized. Do you know what my motto is? It is: 'I will!' And these two little words have already so often carried me over a mountain of difficulties. 'I cannot!' gives up. 'I will!' ascends the mountains. I am full of hope, full of enthusiasm. Stella, keep that fire well stoked! Do not let it go out. Make me warm, let me glow, Stella, I beg you, do not let me go.

I thank God that I can answer 'No!' to your question as to whether the condition of the people is still as wretched as Multatuli had described it. No, as far as I know the story of Saijah and Adinda belongs to the past.[6] It is true that the people sometimes suffer hunger, but this is definitely not the fault of their leaders. They surely cannot be held responsible for the delay in the coming of the rains which the ordinary man so desperately needs for his fields. Or could they ward off the over-abundant water which the heavens empty out over the sawahs? And, if the padi harvest fails due to an insect plague, or drought, or because of an over-long East monsoon, the Government excuses the people experiencing those calamities from paying taxes, while in times of famine the administration distributes food and money to the needy. If the fields are destroyed by a mice plague, the Government offers a reward for the destruction of that pest. Should a dike burst during the wet monsoon, as at the moment because of the high water level in the rivers, the rulers do everything possible to rectify the damage.

Last year a fish farming village lay underwater for a week; and for days and nights Pa stayed at the scene of the disaster. The repair of several kilometres of dike was paid for out of private funds that were later repaid by the Government. But who would give back what the waters had robbed from the people? Of the 100,000 fish in the ponds, only fifteen remained after the floods. Some time

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6 The tragic story of the Javanese lovers, Saijah and Adinda, in Douwes Dekker's book, *Max Havelaar,* epitomized the effects of feudal exploitation condoned under Dutch colonialism. While indicating that colonialism has improved, Kartini then goes on to detail the oppressive circumstances of Javanese officials that persist under colonialism.

after the floods, one of the engineers of the waterworks visited Papa to tell him it was his fault that the village had been flooded: he had incorrectly arranged the water drainage system.

Then there is the case of Demak, the district for which my uncle[7] is responsible; it would be impossible to bring that region to a condition of prosperity, whatever you might do. It fluctuates from one extreme to another. During the East monsoon the rivers dry up and in the West monsoon the area is flooded. The Government has already spent tons of money to ensure the area has water in the dry season and to contain the serious banjirs during the wet season, yet without effect. Magnificent canals have been dug which provided thousands with work, yet they remain of little use. During the East monsoon, the region continues to thirst and during the West monsoon everything floats on the water. No, Stella, the Government provides effectively for the welfare of the people of Java, but unfortunately it leaves them burdened by heavy taxes.

No, Stella, the people are no longer willfully plundered by their leaders and, should this occasionally still happen, the guilty individual is either dismissed from office, or downgraded. But what does exist, or rather proliferate, is this evil: the acceptance of bribes which I think is equally as shameful as the appropriation of the belongings of peasants, as in *Max Havelaar*.

But I should not judge this simply on the basis of the bare facts; I should take account of the circumstances in which the perpetration of this evil takes place. In the first place, Natives regard the offering of presents to their superiors as a token of respect and homage. Acceptance of such presents is forbidden by the Government. But the lesser native officials are so miserably paid that it is almost a wonder how they can make ends meet with their meagre salaries.

A district clerk, for instance, who sits bent over his writing table day in, day out, earns the unbelievably large sum of 25 guilders per month, with which he must support himself and his family; pay rent, dress respectably and provide for the external appearances that maintain their prestige in the eyes of their inferiors. (Do not judge this last matter too harshly, rather have pity on these big children because, by and large, that is what my compatriots are.) The first time such a district clerk is offered a bunch of bananas or some such by some villager he will refuse it; he will continue to refuse it the second time but the third time his refusal becomes more hesitant and on the fourth occasion the offer is accepted without hesitation. He tells himself: this is no crime that I have committed, after all, I did not ask for it, it has been given to me and it

[7] Despite being held in high regard by the colonial government for his administration, in subsequent letters Kartini is very critical of her uncle, Raden Mas Adipati Ario Hadiningrat.

would be stupid of me to refuse it if I can make good use of it. Offering gifts is not only a token of respect but also a safeguard against some misfortune coming from the Government which may one day befall the giver. Should he be nabbed by the wedono for some small transgression then he can count on his friend the district clerk to speak on his behalf.

The officials are badly paid.[8] An assistant wedono, second class, earns 85 guilders. Now, of that 85 guilders, he has to pay a scribe (assistant wedonos do not get a government-paid clerk even though they are no less overwhelmed by paperwork than the wedonos, jaksas and others), a bendy or dos-à-dos and horse, as well as a riding horse to undertake tours of inspection in the forests, purchase a house, pay for general living expenses as well as to entertain the controleur, regent and sometimes the assistant resident who might come to his sub-district to undertake some project. And if the assistant wedono lives very far from the city then these gentlemen will stay in the pasangrahan and the assistant wedono will have the honour of being allowed to prepare the meal for these important guests. Cigars, air belanda, strong drinks and accompaniments cost a great deal, I can assure you, and are quite an expense for a sub-district chief. And you can appreciate that he cannot just present his guests with things that are available locally. No, all these treats must be obtained from the city. It may not be compulsory but the host regards it as his duty to provide those important gentlemen with the best that he has – or does not have.

In Pa's district, this, thank God, does not happen. When Pa goes on a tour of inspection, Pa always brings his own food with him. The controleur does this too and so does the assistant resident. And the odd cup of tea that these gentlemen have with those officials will not ruin them. If there is a murder or a robbery in the desa, the assistant wedono must of course investigate the matter; that is <u>his</u> <u>duty</u>. And in order to locate the perpetrators, he must often dig deep, very deeply, into his purse. It has often happened that native chiefs have pawned their wife's and children's jewelry to raise the money needed to investigate some sinister affair or other. But surely the money they spent in carrying out Government duties will be refunded them by the Government? I wish it were true. Many an official, I mean Native official, has been reduced in this way to a state of destitution. When my brother was unable to make ends meet on his salary, Papa sprang to his aid. What, in heaven's name, can officials do who cannot make do on their salary and who have no money, parents or

[8] Kartini is evidently here summarizing a well-rehearsed argument amongst Javanese officials.

family who can financially support them? And the people keep coming with offerings and you can see your wife and children with torn clothing … Do not judge too harshly, Stella.

I know the problems of the native rulers; and I have relatives in all the branches of the civil service, I know the weal and woe of the people, because there also I have blood relations.[9] And what is the Government about to do? It will reorganize the civil service. The Native personnel will be significantly reduced for the benefit of … European civil servants. By this reduction *f*164,800 will be saved annually and this will be for the benefit of European civil servants employed by the Binnenlands Bestuur. In comparison with others, these civil servants are really miserably paid. But should the Government make good this fault by disadvantaging the corps of Native officials? It is true that, in exchange, a few frugally paid positions will be financially improved and assistant wedonos will get Government-paid clerks, but how can this compare with the numerous higher posts (that have certainly not been shown to be superfluous) that are being abolished. Everywhere people are grumbling about this government regulation. The proposals for this reorganization have been approved by both chambers of parliament [in the Netherlands] and the reorganization of the colonial Administration will be implemented in July.[10] Almost all the Residents have protested against these proposals but His Exc. the Governor General demands it so; despite all the protests the reorganization will proceed. I hope the Government will not pluck bitter fruit from this decision.

And now – about the people, or the population of Java as a whole. The Javanese are just big children my brother says and I agree with him. What has the Government done for the education of the people? For the sons of the aristocracy of the country there are the so-called chiefs' schools,[11] teacher training schools[12] and the Doktor-Jawa school,[13] and for everyone else there

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9 Having previously mentioned the prominence of the Condronegoro family, here Kartini is referring to the relatives of her biological mother, Ibu Ngasirah, a prominent local family.

10 The reorganization of an expanding bureaucracy had been under discussion since 1896 and legislated in the Dutch parliament in 1900. Change implemented in 1900 included the reduction of the number of residencies – including the demotion of Jepara to an assistant residency – and a reduction in the number of higher Javanese officials.

11 There were three of these schools (Opleiding School voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren (OSVIA), or Hoofden School) located at Bandung, Probolinggo and Magelang. The language medium was Dutch. They were reformed after the enquiry in which Kartini's uncle had participated and at the time were educating about 60 students in a five-year course.

12 There were a number of government and mission teacher training schools, or 'kweekschool'.

13 Renamed STOVIA, School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (School for the Training of Native Doctors) in 1900, this was a Dutch language medium institution

are the native schools, one in each district. However, the Government has split this latter educational institution into two classes.[14] In the first, which are only located in the regional capitals, the same curriculum is taught as before the separation, but in the second the children now only learn Javanese (reading and writing) and a little arithmetic. No Malay may be taught there, as was the case before; why that is, is not really clear to me. I think the Government believes that when the people learn, they will no longer want to work on the land.

Papa has submitted a memorandum on education to the Government. Oh, Stella, I wish that you could read it.[15] You should know that a large section of the aristocracy has supported what the Government has done. The Javanese aristocracy is crumbling and the Government, including that in the Netherlands, as well as the individuals themselves, want to raise them up again and assist them to prosper. The aristocracy sees with envious eyes how the sons of the people are becoming educated and are being employed by the Government in large numbers because of their knowledge, capability and diligence.[16] Sons of the common people are attending European schools and show that in all respects they can compete with the sons of the aristocracy. The aristocracy wants to retain power for itself; it alone wishes to retain control of the highest authority in the country, appropriate for itself Western civilization and development. And the Government aids and supports them, because it benefits from this. In 1895 it decreed: no Native child (of 6 to 7 years of age) would be admitted to a public elementary school for Europeans if it is not yet able to speak Dutch, unless it has the express permission of the Governor General …

How is a Native child of six or seven able to learn Dutch unless it has a Dutch governess? And then, even if there is the opportunity to learn the Dutch language, a child must first learn its own language, thus learn to read and write in Javanese. Only the Regents now ask permission from the GG for

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many of whose graduates later became leaders of the emergent Indonesian nationalist movement.

14 Although there were European elementary schools such as the one Kartini herself attended, native elementary schools were divided into 'First Class Native Schools' established in provincial capitals and where Dutch was taught and 'Second Class Native Schools' in other towns. The 'Hoogere Burger School' (HBS) or grammar school such as the one Kartini's brother attended in Semarang was not segregated.

15 It has not been possible to trace this memorandum and it has not been cited elsewhere.

16 This may have been an implicit criticism of her uncle who had advocated greater access to Dutch language education for the sons of the Javanese nobility. Her brother Kartono made similar suggestions for greater access to the Dutch language for the better-off classes more generally in a speech in 1899.

their children to be admitted to European schools; the lesser Native officials fear their requests will be refused and therefore do not do so. Is it pretentious of Papa to have brought to the Government's attention the fact that African and Ambonese children do have the right to direct entry to European schools without being able to understand a word of Dutch? Stella, I know very well from my own school days that there were masses of European children going to school who knew just as much Dutch as I did when I had just started.[17]

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Pa says in his Memorandum: the Government cannot possibly prepare the rice for the table of every Javanese,[18] but what it can do is to provide him with the means to reach the place where the food, and that is Education, can be found. The provision of good education for the people is the equivalent of the Government providing it with torches so that it may find the right path for itself, which will lead to the place where the rice may be obtained.

No, Stella, I will not quote any further; perhaps one day I can send you the entire memorandum, then you can see from that what the condition of the people is at the moment. Pa will do what he can to improve the position of the people, and I place myself at his side. Papa is also very attached to his family heritage which is the oldest in the whole of Java. But what is right is right and what is fair is fair. You see, in terms of education and culture we want to be the equals of Europeans. The right, which we demand for ourselves, we should also accord to others. To prevent the education of the people would be equivalent to the action of the Czar who preached peace to the world while he trod on the rights and privileges of his own subjects. Two laws: one for us and one for them – no! God save us from this. The European deplores many character traits of the Javanese, for instance their indifference, acquiescence etc. Well then, Dutchmen, if you deplore these defects so much, why do you do nothing to remove these vices? Why do you not stretch out a hand to raise the brown brother? Believe me, all that evil can be wiped out. Remove the cloth bound tightly around his brain, open his eyes, and you will see that in him there is something other than a desire to do bad things, which, in the main, derives from stupidity and ignorance. There are examples aplenty, I do not need to

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17 Department of Education annual school reports regularly reported Inspectors' complaints that European children of mixed parentage did not speak Dutch at home and arrived at school with a poor grasp of the language.

18 It would appear that Abendanon's visit to Jepara was in relation to Kartini's father's report concerning the need to discuss the expansion of education. There appears to be no extant copy of this memorandum.

look very far, nor do you, Stella. Before you are the thoughts of someone who belongs to that despised brown race. How can they judge us, what we do and do not do? Do they know us? No, no more than we know them!

If you are interested in this subject, then try to get the October edition of *Neerlandia*. There you will find the address given by my brother at the Congress of the Nederlandsch Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde at Gent. Professor Kern brought him there and asked him to speak. The feelings he expressed there are also mine, ours.[19]

You ask me, 'Has your father much power?' What exactly is power? Papa does have a great deal of influence but power is only possessed by the colonizers. My brother argued for making Dutch compulsory as the language of government business. Read it, Stella, read his address, if not for your own interest, then for my sake. The Dutch laugh and ridicule us for our ignorance, but when we try to educate ourselves, then they adopt a defiant attitude towards us. Oh! What a lot of sorrow I experienced at school, where the teachers and many of my fellow pupils were so hostile towards us. But not all teachers and pupils hated us. Many knew us and were as fond of us as any other child. Many teachers found it difficult to award the highest mark to a Javanese, even though it was deserved. My brothers told me that at the HBS they experienced a lot of opposition. But, thank God, the elementary school staff contained no narrow-minded individuals.

What value did my brothers gain from what they learnt at the HBS? I will tell you the story of a cultured and educated Native. That boy undertook the final exam and was the number one student of the three HBS schools in Java. At first his plan was to go to Europe to continue his studies. But his mother feared that her son would become totally Europeanized since he had already become engaged here to a European girl. She opposed his plans and threatened him with suicide and such things. He loved his mother very much, and therefore stayed. He then had no other choice but to enter the Native civil service. He had a very powerful protector in Batavia but even the Vice-President of the Council of the Indies could not save him from the narrow-mindedness of his Dutch superiors. That young person was accustomed to feel

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[19] The speech, presented to the society in 1899 and entitled 'Dutch language in the Indies', was the first ever public expression of Javanese demands by a Javanese in the Netherlands. Professor Kern (1833–1917) was professor of Oriental Languages at Leiden University. He was born in Java and supported the expansion of Dutch language education. Kartini later reports that Kern took care of Kartono when a student there. The speech was to the annual conference of the Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond: Vereeniging tot Handhaving en Verbreiding van de Nederlandsche Taal (The General Dutch Association: Society for the Maintenance and Dissemination of the Dutch Language) and reproduced in its journal.

welcomed; both in Semarang, where he went to school, and in Batavia, where he sat the exam, in even the most respectable homes – that genial gymnasium student with his cultured manners and great modesty. Everyone spoke with him in Dutch, the language in which he expressed himself so well. One day he returned home to his parents directly from such an environment and his first thought was that he should report to the local authorities. He found himself in the presence of the Resident, who spoke to him, and here my friend made a mistake. How was it that he had dared to reply to that great man in his own language? The next morning his notice of appointment was sent to him at home: it was as clerk to a controleur in the mountains. And here the young man had to stay to think over his 'crime', in order to forget everything that he had accumulated for himself in school.

He was there for several years and a new controleur, actually an aspirant controleur came, who made the cup of his suffering overflow. His new chief, you see, was a former fellow student, who was not noted for his mental abilities. The young man, who had once been number one in everything, had now to crawl across the floor before his former dim-witted schoolmate, speak to him in high Javanese while he was spoken to in broken Malay. Can you imagine the suffering of this proud and haughty heart when he had been so humiliated? How much inner strength he must have had to bear that teasing and provocation for so long. But in the end he could bear it no longer: he left for Batavia and requested an audience with the Governor General, which he was granted. The result of the audience was that he was sent to the Preanger with a commission to make a study of rice cultivation there. He made himself useful by translating a report about the cultivation of many types of crops from Dutch into Javanese and Sundanese. The Government awarded him an honorarium of several hundred guilders.

A vacancy became available on the staff at the school for controleurs in Batavia. A teacher of Javanese was repatriating. And his friends (the friends of the Javanese man) did everything possible to get that position for him, but without success. It was a stupid notion, that a native might teach European students and, what was more, Europeans who would become public servants. Forget such a crazy idea! I would ask you, who better to teach Javanese language than someone who is a born Javanese! The young man returned to his hometown where, in the meantime, another Resident had arrived and the talented son of the brown race was finally allowed to become an assistant wedono. So it had not been for nothing that he had been exiled for several years in that isolated place – he had learnt about life, amongst other things that there was no better way of serving Europeans than by crawling before

them in the dust and never speaking a word of Dutch in their vicinity. He could speak French to the pigs which destroyed the gardens of the villagers, have English conversations with the dogs who kept him awake at night and discussions in German with the oxen or the kucings. Other people had now taken over the reins and when a position as translator of the Javanese language became available, he was temporarily entrusted with this position. Now he was no longer in anybody's way!

Stella, I know an assistant resident who speaks Malay to a regent even though he knows that the latter speaks good Dutch. Everyone in fact speaks Dutch to the native ruler except for the assistant resident. My brothers speak in high Javanese to their superiors and they in turn speak either in Dutch or in Malay to them; those that do the former are friends of ours and several of them have asked my brothers to use the Dutch language with them but they chose not to and Pa also would not allow it. The boys and Pa know only too well what they need to hold to in this regard. There is too much attention to the idea of 'prestige' by civil servants who think themselves gods. I pay no attention to their pretensions: indeed, I get great pleasure from the way they defend that prestige in front of us Javanese. I have spoken about this with several civil servants I am friendly with. They did not disagree but neither did they affirm my assertions even though I am sure that they agreed with me in their hearts. This also is for the sake of prestige. Can you therefore understand that I cannot suppress a smile at such a situation? It is so amusing how those great men attempt to instill respect in us.

I had to bite my lip in order not to burst out laughing recently when, while travelling, I saw an assistant resident go from his office to his home in the shade of a golden umbrella which his assistant held above his noble head.[20] It was such a silly spectacle! Oh, divine being, if you only knew how the majority, who now respectfully move aside for the glorious umbrella, will later make fun of you behind your back. What do you think of the fact that many, yes, very many, government officials have their feet and knees kissed by native chiefs? A foot kiss is the highest mark of respect that we Javanese can give either to our parents, our older relatives or our own leaders.[21] We do not gladly show this respect to strangers, and we do this only against our will, if it is required.

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20 Ceremonial umbrellas were traditional symbols of Javanese authority. During formal processions, the number and colour of the umbrellas that could be carried was determined by rank.

21 A formalized knee (foot) kiss was delivered as a mark of respect on formal occasions. It was performed by kneeling before a superior.

No, the European only makes himself look ridiculous in our eyes when he demands of us marks of respect which only our own leaders have a right to. That residents and assistant residents have themselves addressed as 'Kanjeng' is as it should be, but that even plantation supervisors, road supervisors and tomorrow perhaps even station masters have their servants refer to them with titles is just plain stupid. Do these people know what 'Kanjeng' means? They ask of their inferiors the same marks of respect which the people show to their leaders. Oh! oh! I thought only the ignorant Javanese loved such foppery, but now I see that the civilized, educated Westerner is also not averse to it – yes – is in fact passionately devoted to it.

I never allow women older than myself, although my inferior in social status, to show me the honour to which I am entitled. I know that they would like to: even though I am much younger than they, I am a descendant of the aristocracy whom they so much revere, for whom they would sacrifice life and property. It is really touching how these humble people are devoted to their superiors. It pains me deeply to see people, older than myself, crawling in the dust before me.

When my brother went to Holland he also left many enemies behind. Not that he ever had anything to do with the people, but they would not forgive this Javanese for having the initiative to reach out to gain skills and knowledge which were the possession of his overlord. Many Europeans here are greatly concerned that the Javanese – their inferiors – are gradually educating themselves, and that every now and then a brown person appears who demonstrates that he has just as good a set of brains in his head and heart in his body as the white person.

Much attention was paid to my brother's address: it was even referred to in the budget speeches for 1900. A commission will be sent out to undertake an investigation into the accuracy of his assertions regarding the desirability of making Dutch compulsory as the language medium between European and Native civil servants. And, oh joy, all the Indies' papers are on the side of my brother. In response to his address, a friend of the Javanese has written a number of editorials devoted to the interests of his protégés (the Javanese). Oh, I know that when my brother returns he can count on the hatred of the entire world of the European civil service here and he will also find much opposition from the private citizenry.[22]

But do what you like, you will never be able to hold back the tide of the times. I am very, very fond of the Dutch people, and I am grateful for much

[22] For a translation of the text of Kartono's speech see Coté 2005a.

that we enjoy from them and because of them. Many, very many, of them we can call our best friends, but there are also very, very many who are hostile towards us for no other reason than that we dared to compete with them in terms of education and culture. They make this clear to us in very painful ways. 'I am European, you are Javanese' or, in other words, 'I am the conqueror, you are the conquered'. Not just once, but several times we have been spoken to in broken Malay even though the person knew very well that we could speak the Dutch language. It does not matter to me in which language we are spoken to as long as the tone which is used is genuine. Recently a Raden Ayu was also spoken to in this way by a gentleman and very confidently she replied: 'Sir, excuse me for asking, but would you kindly speak to me in your own language. I do speak and understand Malay, but unfortunately only high Malay, I do not know pasar Malay.' Was our gentleman's nose put out of joint! Very badly!

Why is it that so many Hollanders find it unpleasant to converse with us in their own language? Oh, now I know, Dutch is too beautiful to be uttered by a brown mouth. The other day we were visiting some Totokkers.[23] The people who were in service there were former sobats of ours; we knew they could understand and speak Dutch well. I told the people this and what was the response from my host? 'No, they may not speak Dutch.' 'They may not? Why?' I asked. 'Natives must not know Dutch.' Surprised, I stared at the speaker; I quickly recovered from my surprise and a mocking smile flickered at the corners of my mouth. The gentleman went a fiery red, mumbled something in his beard and discovered something extraordinary on his shoe, at least he gave it all his attention.

Now – a little anecdote that took place in the Preanger. It was in the evening – the Regent of X had visitors in his kabupaten. They were a civilian and the resident of the region; a little later an aspirant controleur came to enlarge the gathering. The son of the house, a student at the Gymnasium School, home on holidays, was walking towards the pendopo. When, however, he saw that his father was not alone he wanted to go away again but the resident had seen him and called to him. His Honour greeted the boy warmly and held a long and friendly conversation with him. When this conversation with the resident had come to an end, he approached the young official and bowed

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23 The term 'totokker', or 'totok', was applied to newly arrived Europeans, normally to take up a position in the colonial service, who intended to return to Europe. Implied also was that such people held metropolitan European attitudes, in contrast to Europeans born in the colony, the majority of whom were of mixed European and Indonesian parentage.

politely to him. That little gentleman, however, did not think it necessary to return the polite greeting with anything more than a barely noticeable nod of the head and, while his cold eyes regarded him disparagingly from top to toe, he coolly uttered this word: 'Tabee' (a greeting in Malay). The boy paled, his lips trembled, and his hands curled into a pair of fists.

Much later he told the civilian who had witnessed the incident: 'I am very, very fond of Hollanders, sir, and regard them as amongst my best friends, but I shall never be able to forget that 'Tabee' uttered by the aspirant, it cut me to the quick.'

Oh! Stella, I have had the opportunity to observe all kinds of situations in Indies' society, and as a matter of course I have looked behind the conventions of the world of public officials. There are ravines there so deep, Stella, that the very sight of them would make you dizzy! Oh God! The world is so full of misdeeds, full of such horrible atrocities! There are residents and assistant residents in comparison to whom Slijmering in *Max Havelaar* is an angel.[24] No, I do not want to turn my letter into a chronicle of scandals.

But let me continue a little further with this subject. Perhaps you also know that many years ago a Javanese studied in Europe and took the examination for controleur. The late King William III declared that natives proving themselves to be suitable and having completed the required exams could be appointed to the civil service of the Binnenlands Bestuur (European).[25] The abovementioned Javanese passed the exams, requested and received official recognition as a European. Yes, that man went even further: he became Christian in order to be able to marry the daughter of a Dutch parson.

He was sent out by His Exc. the Minister of Colonies and placed at the disposal of the Gov. Gen. The gentlemen in Batavia did not know what to do; they asked the Javanese what he wanted. Did he want to become a Regent? Had he agreed to this he would have had a brilliant career. He would have immediately obtained the highest appointment open to a native official. But this Native, raised in the land of freedom of thought and speech, full of illusions and golden dreams replied: 'No!' He had not studied to become a Regent. He had not spent his time in that far-off country to fall back into the old ways; he wanted to enter a new world that, after all, had been made available to him by command of the King. The gentlemen were obliged to give

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24 The name 'Slijmering', suggesting 'bootlicker' and 'slime', is the name of the senior local Dutch official in the novel *Max Havelaar,* accused in the book of condoning the oppression of the Javanese in the interests of making profits.

25 Binnenlands Bestuur, (Lit: Inland administration) and widely referred to as 'BB', was the general department of colonial administration, as distinct from the specialist departments such as education or agriculture.

him such an appointment as he desired since it was the will of His Majesty. There was nothing else for it but that the gentlemen appoint him as a civil servant and later as an aspirant controleur. How surprisingly difficult it proved to be for a Native to become an aspirant controleur! What a problem for the gentlemen of Batavia. How wretched that there were now Europeans serving under him, a Native!

This man died many years ago, his mouth is now sealed for eternity. But not every European in Java is a hater of Javanese people. That native controleur also had friends, although not many, and they were able to bear witness to how their compatriots had made life a misery for the Javanese wearer of the braided cap.

In a parliamentary debate in the First Chamber, a well-known man in the Netherlands and a good friend of Javanese people described the treatment received by Raden Mas Ismangoen[26] (the native controleur) from his European colleagues as 'despicable'.

How pleased the Indies government was when the position of Inspector of Native Education became available and they were able to offer this to Ismangoen. And he, exhausted by the impossible life he experienced as controleur, thankfully accepted the post. The whole of Java breathed a sigh of relief, the difficult intruder had been removed from the circle of European officials. Together with Ismangoen, there was also a Christian Ambonese who came out from the Netherlands as a controleur.[27] He experienced the same ill treatment from his white colleagues as his Javanese colleague. He is now no longer a controleur, but a mine director on the island of Banka. Oh! If only men like Multatuli would arise once more. How cruelly they treated that great thinker, that genius, that human being in the noblest sense of that word. Perhaps you will hear a story from the Far East one of these days, about how an upright European had to stand aside for an unworthy native ruler.

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[26] Ismangoen Danu Winato was the first Indonesian to undertake the training course for prospective Dutch colonial officials in Delft in 1875. It was here that he met Jacques Abendanon who undertook the same course and from whom Kartini presumably learned of his experience. He married a Dutch woman. Approved in the Netherlands for appointment, this was resisted in the colony. He was eventually appointed as inspector of Native Education in 1894 but died the same year. This entire account was deleted from the original letter for the 1911 publication.

[27] This appears to refer to the case of HK Manupassa, an Ambonese. If so he was officially given the legal status of 'equal to European' and later naturalized Dutch and became assistant resident. At the time of Kartini's writing a similar case sparked widespread discussion about the possible amalgamation of the European and Native civil service which however did not eventuate.

Oh! Now I understand why there is opposition to the education of the Javanese. When the Javanese is educated he will no longer say 'yes' and 'amen' to everything that his superior chooses to impose on him.

You see, recently articles are being published in *De Locomotief* (the foremost daily paper in the Indies[28]) written by Natives. In these articles they set out their opinions about much that in recent years has been secretly stirring the thoughts if not of all, then certainly of the majority of, Native officials. Not only the foremost but also the more junior ranks of native officials in the country are letting themselves be heard. The daily papers are calling this a pleasing sign of the times and are applauding it. What the European officials think of it I do not know; I do know that a controleur has proposed a reorganization of the Binnenlands Bestuur which would cost the Government nothing and which would be of benefit not only to the European, but also to the native officials. He advocated the value of an administration where the people are ruled by their own leaders. This is a proposal that has also been put forward to both Chambers of the States General.[29] This also demands the compulsory use of Dutch as the official language between European and native officials. Wonderful! So my brother therefore is not standing alone.

Here it is just as with the women's movement with you: the Javanese are emancipating themselves. And in the same way that your women and girls are being opposed by those who have been their masters for centuries, here the Javanese are being hindered in their development by their superiors.

Here it is only just beginning. Nevertheless, it is divine that European men of name and position are encouraging our cause. The battle will be fierce: the fighters will not only have to cope with their opponents but also the indifference of their own compatriots for whom they are taking up arms. And, when the battle for emancipation of our men is in full flight, then the women will rise up. Poor men, what a lot you will have to put up with.

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28 The Semarang-based newspaper, *De Locomotief,* established in 1863 gained a reputation as the most progressive Dutch language newspaper in the colony. Under the editorship of Pieter Brooshooft (1875–1902), who coined the term 'ethical policy', it became, from the mid 1880s, the main colonial voice advocating policy reform.

29 Apart from administrative reorganization, the new Dutch government in 1901 held that the colonial role of a Christian nation should be to act as 'guardians' and declared as its key objective the welfare of the Native, commonly referred as the 'ethical policy'. Much of Kartini's commentary on colonial conditions reflects this broader reformist discourse.

Oh! How wonderful that we happen to be living in these times! In this period of transition from the old to the new.

Recently I read: 'Do not reject, ye elders, everything that is new. Remember, everything which is now old was once new.' (I quote from memory).

Oh, what a lot I have written: I hope that I have not made you too tired with all this. And, oh, forgive me if I have allowed myself to get too carried away by my emotions and here and there have written something that pains you! Stella! Forgive me that I completely forgot to whom I was speaking. We have come together in such mutual understanding. You told me that I am nothing less but a soul-mate to you. And that is how I have regarded you! I am not a Javanese, not a child of the despised brown race to you, and for me you are not someone who belongs to the white race which hates, despises and ridicules the Javanese. For me you are a white person in the true sense of the word, white in skin and soul, for whom I have high regard, whom I love with all my heart, as would many of my countrymen I have no doubt if they but knew you. Oh, if all Hollanders were like you and many of my Dutch friends whom I respect and love!

Barthold Meryan[30] has been promised to me but till now I have not yet seen it; probably the book dealer has had to send to the Netherlands for it … but I have recently read *Moderne Vrouwen* by Jeanette van Riemsdijk,[31] translated from the French. I put the book down in disappointment. I had read so many wonderful reviews about it. This novel of the times was supposed to be in all respects superior to *Hilda van Suylenburg*. It was supposed to be perfect, without a blemish. But, in my opinion *H v S* remains the Ratu (Queen) of anything written till now about women's emancipation. I would not presume to offer a critique on *Moderne Vrouwen* but in my opinion the book lacks the glow and inspiration of *H v S*.

Would you believe that I read *H v S* in one go? I locked myself in my room, forgot everything, I could not put the book down, it just carried me away!

It is a pity that my notebook has gone astray: I wanted to ask you to read something that I read recently. It is a piece translated from the English and is called 'The purpose of the Women's Movement', but I can no longer

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30 Cornélie Huygens' (1848–1909) *Barthold Meryan*, 1897. Huygens was a leading Dutch socialist feminist. This influential novel recounts the life of a conventional middle-class man who eventually leaves his wife and social position to begin a more meaningful life with an 'emancipated' woman.

31 Jeannette van Riemsdijk (née Kikkert) (1869–1931). *Moderne Vrouwen* was first published in 1899 and noted for its feminist 'message'.

remember if it was in *De Gids* or in the *Wetenschappelijke Bladen*.[32] And then, what you should read if you do not know it already is 'De Wayang Orang' by Martine Tonnet[33] in the November edition of *De Gids*. It is about the Javanese and their art and the court of Yogyakarta; very interesting. You will enjoy it, truly. The other day I read *Minnebrieven* by Multatuli for the second time. What a brilliant man he is. It is wonderful that before long a cheap edition of his works will appear.[34] I will look very sweetly at Papa. The father of our assistant resident was a good friend of Multatuli and from him we have heard some anecdotes from the life of that genius.[35] Couperus is still in the Indies; when he returns to the Fatherland I think a glorious book will appear about my country.[36] How wonderful and enchanting his language is!

Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

Beginning 1900

You know how fervently we have longed to go to Europe. We were prepared to accept the possibility of studying here because Europe was beyond our reach. Last year we would have been overjoyed by the opportunity of going to Batavia even though our thoughts then had already been turned to Europe. We had, namely, wanted to ask the Indies government to send us to Europe at government expense. There, Roekmini would undertake a course in the pictorial arts so that later she can devote her skills to the revival of the Indies

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32 Kartini was referring to the two main progressive Dutch cultural and intellectual journals. With all these citations, Kartini is demonstrating that she is thoroughly conversant with the progressive discourses of the day and completely up to date with the latest literature. All the works and authors Kartini cites were extensively discussed in the Netherlands' leading cultural journal, *De Gids*, to which she was evidently subscribed.

33 Martine Tonnet's piece appeared in *De Gids*, 1899. Tonnet was connected to leading cultural and colonial reform figures such as Conrad van Deventer. In 1908 she published several articles on Javanese antiquities, one of the first women to publish such articles.

34 All Multatuli's works were republished several times at the turn of the century because of their dramatic return to popularity amongst colonial (and social) reformists in the Netherlands and the Indies.

35 This reference to the new assistant resident of Jepara, GL Gonggrijp, indicates his 'progressive' orientation. He became best known for his articles, in the form of letters signed 'De Opheffer', (the 'uplifter'), published in the *Bataviaasche Handelsblad* and later published as *Brieven van Opheffer.* These satirized the hypocrisy of many upholders of the 'ethical policy'. He later assisted after the death of Kartini in Rembang.

36 Louis Couperus (1863–1923) was a leading modern Dutch writer with relatives living in Java. In 1920 he provided an introduction to the first English translation of Kartini's letters. The book resulting from his sojourn in Java was *De Stille Kracht,* published in 1900. Raising serious questions about the future of Dutch colonialism, it became a classic representation of the 'mysterious East'.

arts, one of the means of improving the welfare of the people. Kleintje [Kardinah] would go to a domestic arts school in order to be able later to teach economy to prospective mothers and housewives and to teach proper values so essential for these careless, vain, Javanese people who live only for pomp and splendour. And for me to undertake teacher training, to be able to teach prospective mothers, alongside intellectual subjects, about love and justice, as we have come to learn that from the Europeans.

The government wants to bring prosperity to Java, to teach the people to be more thrifty, and to begin the process by training its officials. What use is it if men are forced to put aside some money when the women who control the housekeeping do not know the value of money? The Government wants to educate the Javanese, to civilize them and, as a beginning, forces the upper echelons, that is the aristocrats, to learn Dutch. The education of candidates is now a criterion in making appointments. But is an intellectual education everything?

If one is to be really civilized the intellectual and moral education must go hand in hand.

And who can do most for the latter, who can do most to raise the moral quality of mankind? The woman, the mother, because on her lap a person receives her very first education, and there the child first learns to feel, think, speak. And this initial education is of utmost importance for the rest of its life.

One of the faults that Javanese have that must be suppressed is their vanity. That alone would contribute greatly to the welfare of the Javanese and we can achieve that through moral education.

So much that can be of use and a blessing to the land and its people remains unutilized because people choose not to make use of their abilities because of vanity. The aristocracy would rather suffer poverty and misery than be well-off but have to work without a gold-etched umbrella over their high-born heads. The aristocracy despises everything that is not covered by this much-desired object – the golden sunscreen.

Yet while telling you of these things I also have to tell you that <u>you</u> are the <u>first</u> that we are telling this great news to. Father probably knows this too – but he didn't get it from us. Kartono sent a letter to Father at the same time he sent one to us. Jhr v d W knows its contents and authorized my brother to write to Father in this vein on behalf of our interests.[37] We will soon go to Father and also to Moeder to inform them of this and that and to plead

[37] Kartini refers here to the former governor-general, CHA van der Wijck (1893–1899). The foregoing discussion rehearses the content of Kartini's later education memorandum.

to them for permission. Please give us the support of you both – suggest to Father that this is more honourable than anything else and that the support from the highest circles in the Netherlands is not to be underestimated. We will be in good hands, the name of Mev. v.d. W stands guarantee for this, and, furthermore, we are not little lambs without care any longer: we have suffered much and experienced much bitterness, and have experience, thought about, felt and battled against more than others of our age. That, let us hope, should save us from any stupidities and give us the strength to persevere to bring to a good conclusion that which we have resolved to do. I will let you know in detail as soon as we have discussed it with our parents. It won't be easy, that I can assure you.[38]

Our people are not very susceptible to high ideals. We need to impress them by an example that speaks to them and demands to be followed if we want to achieve our idea of being leaders and pioneers. And that is why Holland – and foremost to go to study. For us it will be good to go there, Moedertje, help us to go![39]

When we have completed our studies and have returned to Java we will open a boarding school for the daughters of the aristocracy, funded by the government if possible; if not we will try to get private support, perhaps through a lottery or something like that. It should be possible to find some solution when we get to that point – in the meantime our main task is to fight the battles at home. If we have Father's permission then we will feel ourselves wealthier than a king. Oh! Let us hope we can get that!

Oh, it hurts so much, so much. It is terrible to be a Javanese girl with a sensitive heart. Poor, poor parents, how was it that fate gave them such daughters as us? We fervently hope and pray that they be granted a long life and that they may one day be proud of us even if we do not walk under a golden sun umbrella!

Moedertje, please will you both help us to convince father that if he accepts this unexpected offer, and gives his permission, he will not only make us happy, but that he will be relieved of having to worry about us in the future. We will be in good hands and Mev. van der Wyck will be guarantee of that. Dear friends, help us to leave here to work to realize our ideas. A beginning

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38 This previously deleted section of an undated letter to Marie Ovink makes clear that a plan to study in the Netherlands was well advanced prior to Abendanon's visit. These details were not made explicit to Rosa Abendanon.

39 Significantly, while undoubtedly previously discussed in general terms, this concise statement of her plans occurs after her mentor had left Jepara. In 1903 Kartini reverses her argument about the best way to influence her people.

will be made towards ending the great injustice that has made the hearts of thousands of women and children bleed.

I want to apply myself diligently to the study of Dutch, to completely master it, so that I can do with it what I want – and then will try, with my pen, to stimulate the interest of those who can help us in our attempts to bring improvement in the situation of Javanese women.

'Poor little fools' I can hear you say, 'are you attempting to shake that gigantic building, pull it down, on your own?' Yes, we will give it a shake, Moedertje, with all our might. Even if only one stone of it is dislodged we will not consider our lives to have been for nothing.

But before we attempt this we want first to try to guarantee the cooperation of – even if only one – of the best and most educated men in Java. We want to establish links with our educated and progressive men, attempt to gain their friendship, and along with that their cooperation. Our struggle is not against men, but against the old inherited beliefs, the adats, which are no longer relevant for the Java of the future; it is a struggle in which there are some others who, together with us, are the forerunners.

In all eras there have been pioneers in every domain who have had to carry the burden of responsibility, we know that. It is marvellous to have an ideal, a vocation. Call us mad, crazy, whatever you like; we cannot do otherwise, it is in our blood. Grandfather was a pioneer when, half a century ago, he had his sons and daughters educated. We don't have the right to be stupid, to be nothing. Nobility obliges! Excelsior! At the moment we still cannot establish relationships with the men of the young generation. We would be suspected immediately. Friendship between unmarried women and married or unmarried men is regarded as completely unacceptable. Later, when we have established our independence, we will be able to do so. My brother knows them all, either personally or through correspondence. We know there are men who appreciate educated, thinking women. I have heard a man, a highly placed native official, say that it is such a great help and support when the wife is educated and refined.

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

August 1900

Strange that dearly loved but far distant people don't appear to one in dreams even though we are thinking of them or talking about them so often. Only once has your eldest daughter dreamt of you. In that dream you were both

coming back to Jepara and we travelled to Semarang to meet you. We were all greatly affected by seeing each other again, without a word you held us one by one close to you, so warmly, so tightly as though you would never let us go. And there, by your heart, we cried in silent and grateful happiness. When your daughter woke her pillow was wet with tears. The whole morning she was in a melancholic mood because that joy was but a dream.

We fear, we fear, Moedertje, that you will not find your daughters as you had left them. We feel we are slipping backwards. More and more we are coming to the painful realization that we are nothing more than we have always been. What a sad, wretched realization. Oh Life, what have you done to Moedertje Mies's daughters? What has become of her girls?

Where has our wonderful enthusiasm gone? That priceless treasure which had helped us through so much and is so essential to survive this life that will be so difficult for us? Where is the energy, that wonderful desire to be constantly active which produced so much that is dear to us? Where is that pleasure in everything that made us forget that the word 'boredom' even existed in the dictionary?

Things which until very recently we were so interested in and took such pleasure in now leave us indifferent. Moedertje, can you imagine anything more terrible than an indifferent person? And that's the way it will go if there is nothing, or if nothing happens that will wake us from this state of apathy and listlessness in which we reside.

All our former interests lie abandoned in some forgotten corner. Paintings, music (!) handicraft and cooking, correspondence. Reading matter, yes, we have even neglected reading, which used to be such an essential for life. All at once we have become lazy. We have to force ourselves to finish reading even the smallest booklet. Reading is a chore where once it was the greatest and most wonderful pleasure that we knew! Moedertje, this is how far we have gone. We are suffering incredibly under this spiritually deadening, energy sapping, whatever-you-want-to-call-it, feeling. We are doing nothing. If we do something it is mechanically, like a machine. What is the matter with us? We are not ill. Is it perhaps a reaction to that terrible time we have experienced?

Oh, the moral pain, it is sometimes almost unbearable. We have to have something, some work, that involves us completely, that leaves no time for this tortuous meditation; that is the only thing that could shake our slumbering spiritual energy and give us back a zest for work! Work – that is just the whole point. Hungering for work, that is dear to us, this is what so depresses us. It is terrible to feel the energy to work and the zest to work in one and yet be doomed to unemployment!

This and all those other dreadful things have brought us to this state of apathy and paralysis of our spiritual energy. Your eldest daughter is amazed at herself at how long this letter has become – but then it is being written for Moedertje Mies and the words flowed out of the pen by themselves.

We do not, we cannot believe that our lives can end in such an ordinary, such a banal way but yet we cannot imagine how the beautiful dream we have could ever be realized! How close had we not already been to the realization of our ideals, at least that is what we thought! We thought that it was only a matter of days that separated us from the new life that we so desired!

Bitter, bitter disillusionment! It is so painful to think about it again. We don't speak about it here any more but silence is not necessarily agreement, acceptance: to give up everything – now that we have come so far – we will never do and we have never planned to do so. We don't know if what we are doing is sensible but we cannot and will not do anything else than follow the voice of our heart.

Thank you so much for your kind thoughts and good wishes for our future but, oh, you had best set aside those thoughts that you might ever see us, especially your eldest, as happy, much loved, and admired ladies. Certainly we want to love and wish ourselves to be loved, but not just once or by one person.

To give our love, and to win the love of those to whom we hope to devote ourselves is our big dream. When in June we were visiting Mr Sijthoff,[40] the resident asked your eldest if she already knew that the Director of Education was looking for a lady director for a school for Native girls that he wanted to establish. Turning to Father the Resident asked, 'Have you already mentioned it to your daughter, Regent?' Then, turning his attention back to your daughter he asked; 'Wouldn't you want to become the directoress of that school?' She said nothing, lowered her eyes so that Father and the Resident who were sitting next to each other opposite us would <u>not</u> see her eyes which said everything that the firmly closed mouth suppressed. She did not promise that she would remain silent about her wishes and dreams but she <u>knew</u> that Father would not like it if she discussed this with others. Father had to be spared all emotion and this issue is now Father's *cauchemar* …

'They should have been born as boys; they could have developed into fine men' we have heard said *ad nauseam*. If it is really true that we have the characteristics within us from which fine young men are formed why shouldn't

[40] Piet Sijthoff was Resident of Semarang, the residency which incorporated the regency of Jepara. He consistently opposed Kartini's plan to study in Europe and supported Abendanon's proposal for her to become a teacher.

we get some advantage from that to develop into fine strong women? Or does one need other attributes than those that form the recipe to make 'fine young men'? And aren't fine young women useful to society? But it is true, we Javanese women have, in the first place, a nature that is accommodating and submissive. We have to be like clay that can be shaped in any way you want.

Oh, what is the use of talking about all this! It's as though one was on a sinking ship, moaning that one should have stayed home; as though we were reproaching each other; pondering about the causes and then blaming the culprit. All that would do nothing to prevent the ship from floundering. Only a firm hand on the rudder, energetic pumping where it is leaking can prevent the disaster; otherwise one would drown.

In that one year that lies behind us we have experienced more than in all the previous years put together. It seems to your eldest daughter that Father has something to say to her but is hesitating because it will cause her pain. Can you imagine that, Moedertje? How painful it is for Father and for her? Long ago when she urged a speedy end to the issue she noticed a look in his eye so wretched as if it wanted to say: 'Are you then in such a hurry to leave me, child?' She looked away, moved to the depth of her soul!

What a wonderful thing love is. It is heaven and hell together. To love and respect him is the one necessity of our life, and constitutes the greatest proportion of our happiness. Without his love there would forever be a shadow over our lives. We want to receive our happiness from his hands.

Without our love we could never be completely happy, and with his love never completely unhappy.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

13 August 1900

Highly Esteemed Mev. Abendanon,

May these few lines and accompanying photographs which are respectfully offered to you, reach Batavia in time to wish you a hearty 'welcome home' on what we trust is your safe and sound return, on behalf of the Javanese whom you came to visit in their isolated residence, in that forgotten district, that region behind which lies nothing, named Jepara.

We are so very grateful that you came to stay with us! We knew that the Director would come but your arrival was a joyous, wonderful surprise! And should we live to be 100, never, never would we be able to forget 8–9 August 1900; those few hours spent by your side have become a beautiful memory

which we will keep for the rest of our lives and will be for us a beacon if life should take us through valleys of darkness.

It was like a dream! – that glorious evening by the sea, in the Kabupaten, that journey from Jepara to Kudus![41] It was wonderful! heavenly! – really too beautiful to be true – and it was not a dream, it was a heavenly reality! One of God's angels had flown down directly from heaven to revive in us poor human beings that most beautiful gift from God which was dying, if it was not already dead: a belief in Goodness, eternal beauty, a belief in a beautiful future, and a love for humanity and life!

Our view of life, dimmed by the cruel, bitter irony of reality, now once again sparkles with a fiery passion for the Ideal! Lady J de Bosch Kemper,[42] then, was correct in her assertion, any way we affirm it with her: 'Rather a life of struggle than a life without ideals!'

We felt deeply, deeply miserable, because raw reality threatened to murder our ideals – the cold, hard intellect commanded that dreams and illusions be cast away, be buried, because our Native Society had no need for them. And then you crossed our life path … we feel incapable of expressing in words how moved we were – the warmest, most heart-felt expressions appear cold and dispassionate compared to what our hearts feel. Know only this, dear Mevrouw, that as long as our hearts are beating, both your names will remain inscribed in our grateful memories.

When father told us a month ago that the Director of E[ducation], R[eligion] and I[ndustry] would come here and what the purpose of the visit was, we knew that His Exc. had a <u>deep</u> concern for the <u>Javanese</u> and for women! With what anticipation we awaited his arrival! His Exc. came and at his side strode a dear, kind Angel, who, with a friendly gesture, scattered flowers before us. Kind, sincere words came from her lips that were like music to our ears and penetrated deep into our hearts. They were like rays of sunshine that brought light to our soul and brought life and warmth to our hearts. We thank God with all our heart that He sent you to us and that we should meet and feel so mutually attracted!

A few days ago we still knew <u>nothing</u>, <u>nothing</u> about you and now you are as dear to us as though we had known you all of our lives.

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41 This would have been a carriage journey to the steam tram terminus at Kudus.

42 Jeltje de Bosch Kemper (1836–1916), a feminist writer, advocated economic independence for women. In 1891 she helped found the first school of Domestic Economy in the Netherlands in Amsterdam and was president of the Comité ter Verbetering van de Maatschappelijke en den Rechtstoestand der Vrouw in Nederland (Committee for the Improvement of the Social and Legal Position of Women in the Netherlands) established in 1894. Her aristocratic background gave cause for criticism from other Dutch feminists.

How strange and mysterious a feeling of mutual attraction is, it cannot be forced, or bound down – it comes unannounced, unexpected, may come with a single word, but one which provides a deep insight into the inner life of each, binds together two souls which till then had been strangers to each other, with strong, solid bonds.

Oh! It is so wonderful, so heavenly, to find feelings, ideas, which are part of us and very dear to us, shared by others – and it is that which spins invisible, yet strong threads from one heart to the other and brings us closer together than many years of association could!

Holding your hand in both of mine, I thank you deeply for the trust you have shown me! It was a wonderful pleasure for me to be given an insight into that beautiful, rich inner life that is yours.

In your company we felt as though we had been transported to a totally different world, far, far away from the petty mundane affairs of this world, into an atmosphere of pure beauty – in the best and fullest sense of that word. And we had had endless pleasure, felt completely revived and satiated by the purifying, ennobling and refreshing beauty of spirit and soul which you embody. Fortunate is the person who in life may meet with superior souls and spirits! So poor, those who do not know there is a thirst and a hunger other than that of the stomach – who cannot understand that, beyond a high position conceived of in terms of rank and status, there is another 'high position' which puts all else to nought.

We felt so indescribably happy in your company and that feeling continues still. Oh, we could cry out in happiness, sing with the birds and the trees – songs of praise and gratitude to the Creator of the Universe and with winged singers fly jubilantly to heaven to thank Him for this beautiful, wonderful life. It is beautiful and wonderful despite its many dark and shadowy sides – and do those not exist precisely to more sharply define the light? God's purpose for us is good – our lives have been given us as a blessing, not as a trial. We human beings ourselves are the ones who often make of it a cross. How good the Creator's intentions for us are and we can feel them, we are most clearly aware of them, when we are surrounded by the untrammeled Nature that He has created. In Klein Scheveningen, for instance, where everything simply breathes beauty and poesy, peace and tranquility, often we cannot take it all in.

It seems to me as if our lives now have been completely changed, have become more beautiful, much more beautiful since we have come to know you. But what has happened? What has befallen us, I ask myself and then my heart cries out in ecstasy: 'We have met and found Her!'

Oh! How great must be the power, the influence of the aristocracy of the spirit and soul that in the space of several hours can produce such great changes in so many lives. Never, never has making an acquaintance been so wonderful, so delicious, as it was with the two of you. You were not able to take us with you as you had wished, but our dear parents could not prevent you taking the best part of what we possess: our hearts!

We have been constantly thinking of you, and speaking about you both and your offspring in Holland and since 9 August it has become our dream to meet you once more, and to make the acquaintance of your sons about whom their dear Moedertje has told us so much.

It is always so good for us to hear about ideal relations between parents and children. Unfortunately there are so many insensitive parents and ungrateful children (of the latter unfortunately more than the former) in the world that it is for us really refreshing to hear about parents who are completely involved in their children and about children who love their parents and particularly who idolize their mother in the way your John, Didi and Doppie adore their only Moedertje.[43] We can and will not believe that men who love their mothers could ever be bad. It seems an impossibility to us.

I should like to go on writing for hours and hours about everything and nothing were it not that I feel constrained by the thought that I have already troubled you more than enough with this far from brief letter. Once again our sincerest thanks for your unforgettable visit to us and for all the kindness and goodness with which you made us happy.

With our respectful regards also to your honourable husband,
Sincerely yours, Kartini

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

August 1900

'Well, if we don't go to Holland may I then go to Batavia to study to become a doctor?'[44] What Father replied can be briefly summed up as follows: that I should not forget that I was a Javanese, that it was now not yet possible for

[43] In fact they were Rosa Abendanon-Mandri's stepchildren, the children of Abendanon and his first wife, Anna Elizabeth de Lange, who died in 1882. They are John FG (1877–1946), Eduard C (1878–1962) and Geldolph A (1880–1956). Abendanon married Rosa in 1883.

[44] The suggestion to become a doctor (or midwife) appears to have been made by the Ovinks and related to the possibility of Kartini training at the Mojowarno Protestant mission hospital in East Java under Dr Bervoets.

me to go in that direction – it would be different in 20 years' time – but now it is not possible, without experiencing a very difficult life 'because I would be the first'. Father could not decide so suddenly. Father would first have to think long and hard on the matter, discuss it with others and take lots of advice.

This indicates that father has not totally rejected my idea. Father knows that, whatever the cost, I want to be free, emancipated, independent. And that I really will not be happy leading a married life such as it is at the moment.

Then I asked: 'But if Mr Abendanon's Native girls' school were established, could I then become a teacher?' and I told him what Mr Abendanon had asked me and had proposed.[45]

Oh Moedertje! It was as if the heavens opened to reveal their eternal splendour that blinded me and overwhelmed me, when I heard Father say in response to this: 'That is fine, that is beautiful! That you can do!'

'But first I would have to be trained for that. I would have to stay about four years in a cloister to study and then do exams. I would not want to do it without being qualified.

And Father thought my plan was good and reasonable.

Oh Moedertje, how absolutely happy I felt. I had not thought it would be so easy. There was not a single harsh, bitter or sharp word. I did get a severe talking to – yes – but I deserved that, I will gladly admit. But Father did this so gently, so lovingly. Oh, so then I was not mistaken in believing that he completely felt and shared the feelings and hopes of his child; that Father would suffer more than me if he had to cause me pain, and that he hoped just as fervently as me that there would be some solution.

Oh, what a violent, jubilant joy took control of me when I had that heavenly certainty, when I knew that Father, my godly adored father, could accept without sadness my ideas, wishes and yearnings.

It was because of him that I had felt so wretched for months, that I had became uncertain, weak – yes – cowardly, because I could not break his heart. And I had to, because I could, did not want to humiliate myself, allow my woman's heart, my worth as a woman, as a human being, to be trampled upon. I had to oppose their plans. I was morally obligated to my own sense of pride, not to silence my desire. This inner struggle has been very fierce.

Oh! And I have won Father for my cause, and thereby I have conquered the greatest difficulty, removed the greatest obstacle. Now that I know I have

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[45] This account makes clear why Abendanon's suggestion provided an attractive alternative. Kartini now describes the new plan to Marie Ovink after her gloomy previous letter to her, which implied that arrangements for study in Europe had fallen through.

Father on my side, I am approaching the enemy unfazed, happy and alert, with a light tread and a smile on my face!

Now whether I do or do not reach my objective will depend only on my own will and ability. I am full of hope, full of courage, and keep my spirits up Moes! I immediately asked father whether I could send Mevrouw Abendanon the good tidings and I could! That very night I wrote to her and to you these few lines.

It is still a question as to whether the Native Girls' school will in fact be established, but I do not despair about that; various signals indicate that several, if not many, influential people are earnestly striving to raise up the native world and to bring 'light' to the world of the Native woman, to lift her up out of her tragic condition.[46]

In Yogya we visited Mevrouw ter Horst,[47] as I told you earlier. She was very nice, picked us up from the station where she actually missed us since we had got off a station earlier. She had prepared a rijsttafel for us. We had only come to say hello but she wanted to discuss something with me. She told me that regardless of Mr Abendanon's plans which she knew nothing about, Resident de B[48] had serious plans to establish a boarding school for the daughters of native high officials preferably on government costs but if not, funded privately. The resident had asked her to develop a proposal which he would then develop further and she now wanted to ask me what I thought about it and what I thought was necessary for native girls, daughters of native leaders, high and low; what they needed to know and do to reach a higher level of moral welfare. Recently the director of the school for native officials in Probolingo[49] wrote on the subject of 'native education for girls' for a Dutch journal.[50] So there really does exist an earnest endeavour to arrange for the education of native girls. Should the attempt by Mr Abendanon to establish native girls' schools fail, which heaven forbid, and I therefore won't become a teacher, then you won't leave me alone will you Moedertje? Would you then

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46 The most well known proponents in the Netherlands of colonial policy reform and greater support for the advancement of Javanese at the time, were former long-term colonial residents Conrad van Deventer and Henri van Kol. Abendanon, as Director of Native Education and Industry, and Snouck Hurgronje, till 1905 Adviser for Native Affairs, were leading voices for reform within the colonial bureaucracy.

47 Mevrouw ter Horst was the editor of the women's journal, *De Echo*, published in Yogyakarta, in which Kartini published two short stories in 1900.

48 The reference is to the Resident of Yogyakarta.

49 The reference is to the Opleiding School voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren (OSVIA) (Training School for Native Civil Servants).

50 Kartini later reports that Mr Boes had invited Kartini to contribute to his publication, *Nederlandsche Taal* (Dutch Language).

help me get Father's permission to become a doctor? Or won't you allow me to become that either? You two can get Father to agree to so much if you want to.

Since that memorable afternoon, father has been doubly nice to me. He can be so soft, so tender and lovingly put his arm around me as if to shield me against an approaching evil. I feel from everything an immeasurable love and I am very proud of it and – oh, so happy with it!

After we returned from Batavia I have had the feeling we only came home to have a rest, to say hello and then to fly off again. Where to? I want to make the most of being at home because nowhere in the whole wide world will I be so content as with my own parents and it makes me feel so unendingly grateful to know that whenever I leave home it will be with his blessing and I fervently hope also with that of the others.

Previously I was able to learn things quite easily – I was not backward – but between then and now there has been a whole human lifetime. I have forgotten everything I learnt at the 'infants' school' – I was 12½ when I left there. But wanting is almost the same as being able to, isn't it? At any rate I will do my very best and work hard. Both of you now give me your blessing! Keep up my good spirit, willpower and courage, please, dearest! Now I have loyally and honestly confessed everything to you, Moedertje. What do you both think about all this? Tell me straight out what your opinion is. I am entirely your child and you know how much I value the opinion of you both.

I wrote this confession in the conviction – in the firm belief – that no one has a deeper interest in all that pertains to me than you both, and this matter concerns the entire rest of my life. I also know that I can come to you at any time whenever I need advice and support and comfort. And in the times ahead I will certainly often come to you for that.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

August 1900

Highly Esteemed Mevrouw Abendanon,

What language, no matter how well one might be master of it, could properly express the emotions of the soul? It does not exist … Like you, I believe it does not exist, at least not in a form that can be spoken or written. But there is a silent, mysterious language, which is expressed in neither words nor letters, but which can nevertheless be understood and comprehended by anyone with feeling, and which is completely reliable because in its entire vocabulary that little word, 'lie' is unknown!

It is the pure, chaste language spoken by the eyes, those clear mirrors of the soul. And if you could have seen me that afternoon when 5 gently-perfumed sheets trembled in my shaking hands, warm tears trickling down my cheeks, without hearing a single sound from my lips you would have known everything, understood what I was feeling! What neither lips nor pen could express would have been announced to you by my eyes which, swimming in a veil of tears, looked up on high as though searching there to find, amidst the other angels of God, that one who, on gentle wings, had descended to us to comfort and fill our grieving hearts which were keening bitterly for the many sorrows on this earth with heavenly joy! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Each heartbeat cried out, each pulse beat and each breath was a prayer of thanks.

Oh, how unspeakably happy you have made us with your very kind letter in each word of which your warm, sensitive heart is beating for me. Let me take your hand in mine and silently holding it, let me tell you everything my heart felt on reading your words. I cannot tell you how many times I have read your letter, I cannot part with it. We drank from it to the point of intoxication and were brought back to life by the depth of that love and goodness. We will safeguard it like a keepsake, as also your lovely flower token. Our sincerest thanks for that! They are dear to us, those pure flowers of friendship, whose tender colour represents fidelity, and they were picked for us by the soft hands of our dear, kind Angel! I extracted them very carefully from the paper on which they had been attached and they now lie between the pages of my autograph book.

Which of us has deluded herself about the other's personality only time will tell – for my part I am not for one moment afraid of being disillusioned, totally convinced as I am that in you I have found the incarnation of the ideal I have envisaged of what it is to be a woman: high moral and intellectual development, coupled with what is eternally womanly, the most beautiful crown with which a woman may be adorned. You have completely realized the beautiful thought of Helen Mercier's: 'that we can be a complete person, without ceasing to be completely a woman!'[51]

But for you I am afraid a day of cruel disillusionment will come – therefore I beg you do not idealize us so! We are but very ordinary human beings,

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[51] Hélène Mercier (1839–1910) was an important feminist writer who emphasized the ideal of social work for women in the Netherlands, the importance of women's access to education and of women's role in raising the moral condition of society. She was active in projects to improve working class homes in Amsterdam, advocated Toynbee work (that Stella was also involved in) and contributed to *Eigen Haard,* which published one of Kartini's short stories.

a mixture of evil and good, like millions of others; it is possible that at this moment there is more of the good present in us than of evil but the cause of this would not be hard to find. When one lives in simple surroundings, it is no effort to be good, one just is so, naturally. And it certainly needs no great effort nor reward to not do evil if one has no opportunity to do so. Later, when we have flown the warm, safe, parental nest, when we stand alone in the adult world, where no dependable parental arm will enfold us, when life's storms rant and rage around us – no loving hand to support us, hold us, when our feet stumble … only then will it be clear what we are. Oh! I pray so fervently that we do not further increase the mountain of disappointment that life has already brought you. And to you, an equally fervent prayer; do not think us too wonderful – because then it cannot be but that it will result in disappointment and that would cause us such grief. Gradually in bits and pieces, I will truthfully tell you everything about us so that you will get an accurate picture of our characters and so that you, in your great goodness, do not ascribe to us attributes that we do not possess! But even though time will rob you of many illusions about us, for as long as our hearts beat warmly for that centuries-old ideal of noble human beings, 'to make humanity more beautiful, more noble, to bring it closer to Perfection', we simple souls will not be too ordinary for you …

And now I will begin to remove one illusion, we are not as young any more as you thought. I am already 21, the sisters respectively a year younger, then a gap of two years and then a gap of 5 years.

Twenty-one is extremely young for someone who is 'finished' like your fine Didi, but rather old for one who has yet to begin everything. But let me not mourn over lost years, about, 'if only I was …' or 'had I only …'; that will not bring those lost times back. A whole lifetime still lies before us – let us see what we can still make of it. We are full of hope, full of determination and goodwill. Would you be our guide in life? Full of trust, we place our hand in yours, lead us where you will, we will follow.

'I feel so much for the woman, I am so concerned about her condition, unacknowledged and oppressed as she still is in many lands even in this age of enlightenment, I defend her gladly and valiantly.'[52] Thank you noble Woman, for these wonderfully sympathetic words which speak of your great compassion, your deep feeling for your fellow human beings, creatures who for centuries have been disadvantaged and still are – by their fellow human

[52] This is a rare direct quotation from a letter by Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri and provides a unique insight into the feminist convictions of Kartini's most important correspondent.

beings: men. Thank you, my God, thank you! Then there are people, noble of heart and spirit, who concern themselves about the wretched existence of the Native woman, who want to bring light into her poor, dark world!

The heart of the Native woman has bled enough; innocent children have suffered enough – white sister with your warm, compassionate heart, your broad perspective, your rich spirit, reach out a hand to us, raise us up from the pool of grief and misery in which the self-interest of men has thrust us and keeps us immersed. Help us to battle that male self-interest which respects nothing, the demon which for centuries has tortured, trapped women, so that, having become so accustomed to their mistreatment, they no longer see any injustice in it, regard their subjugation with complete stoicism as the entitlement of men, as the inheritance of suffering of every woman. I am still young but I have been neither deaf nor blind and I have heard and seen much, perhaps even too much, that made my heart writhe in pain, that swept me up in furious rebellion against the deeply rooted traditions that are the curse of women and children!

And in desperation, in anguish, wringing my hands together – me – a single person feeling helpless against an evil of gigantic proportions which – oh cruelty! – is under the protection of Islamic teaching and fed by the ignorance of women, the victim! Oh! And then to think that destiny may impose that gruesome injustice called polygamy on me … 'I don't want to' my mouth screams and the heart echoes that cry a thousandfold … But oh, 'want'! – do people in fact have a will? We have to 'must' from the first cry of life to our last breath. Life! How full of puzzles and mysteries you are! We think we know so much and really we know nothing! We think we have a will, an iron will, we pretend we are strong enough to move mountains … but one burning tear, one sorrowful glance from loving eyes and our strength is broken!

May I tell you a story, that is neither entertaining nor interesting but dry, monotonous, endless and will demand from you great patience? First of all I humbly ask your forgiveness for the tiresome hour that I will be imposing on you – I dare do this because you wrote: 'write me as often and as much as you can.' Oh, if you could have only known in advance what advantage would be taken of your great goodness – then those words would never have been written. It is the history of three young, brown girls – children of the sunny East – born blind, to whom sight has been given, who have been given the opportunity to see, experience and admire what is beautiful, what is noble in life, and now, now that their eyes have become accustomed to light and beauty, have come to love the sun and the beautiful surroundings of an enlightened world, they are at the point of feeling a blindfold over their eyes again, of being

pushed back into the darkness from whence they have come and where each and every one of their ancestors has lived!

People blame the books 'full of nonsense', which came from the West and penetrated deep into the inland to the quiet, peaceful region of Java's evergreen coast, where those sisters live, for this refusal, this unwillingness to take up the yoke which surely all her female predecessors had willingly and patiently accepted, and which is now hanging and swaying in the air and may now, at any moment, crash down on unwilling shoulders. But people are not altogether correct, it was not only the books which made her rebellious – to hate conditions which have existed from time immemorial, and which are a curse – a curse for all who are women and girls! The longing for freedom, independence and emancipation was not born of recent days, but already, in her earliest youth, when 'emancipation' was still an unknown word to her, and books and other printed matter which discussed such issues were far beyond her reach, that desire was born in one of the sisters; conditions in the immediate and more distant horizons called it into life.[53]

To Stella Zeehandelaar

23 August 1900

In recent days I have met a number of people who regard Johanna van Woude[54] as a writer who does not know what she is talking about. Well, everyone according to his taste, I will stay true to our J.v.W. and even if the entire world despised her work, we, my sisters and I, will continue to have a high regard for it because to our mind it is fine. *Een Hollandsche Binnenhuisje* will forever ensure for her a warm spot in our hearts. And her leader articles, which are criticized by acquaintances of ours, have steered us away from many mistakes, have taught us much, have revealed many things to us and have shaken us awake so many times when the Indies world had rocked us into slumber. We have much, very much, to thank her for, and we really cannot stand it that she is being attacked like this. I do not know how many times we have become vehement in her defence with our acquaintances. They may not appreciate her

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53 With these sentences Kartini introduces a lengthy account of her childhood which has been included later in Part Two. The original letter was continued briefly on 5 September (see below). The summary here effectively repeats what she had written to Stella in her letter of 25 May 1899.

54 *Een Hollandsche Binnehuisje* (1888) was the most well-known of the many novels by Johanna van Woude (1853–1904), pseudonym for Sophie van Wermeskerken-Junius, editor of *De Hollandsche Lelie*, the Netherlands' first feminist periodical, since 1887.

work but no one can criticize them for that. Tastes vary, fortunately but for that reason they have no right to say such terrible things about her. Recently someone said about her in my presence that she was a 'mixer of poisons'. I was so indignant that I was speechless. Finally I got my voice back and asked the person who insulted her to prove what he had said. 'Are you certain that J.v.W. has forgiven her husband?' I emphasized every word and looked him straight in the face. You should have seen the strange face he pulled. I won't tell you what happened next, suffice to say that it was a long time before anyone dared mention her name disrespectfully in our presence.[55]

But recently it has begun again when the mail brought news that was most damning of our poor editor. The folks were triumphant and hastened to tell me of the scandal in Beverwijk in which J.v.W. was supposed to have played the leading role. I was most upset when I read it in the cable news in the leading newspapers of the Indies. I could not believe it and should it in fact be true, which God forbid, then J.v.W. must have done it in a moment of insanity. News of her escape from the hotel in Beverwijk was dated 4 July and yesterday we received our copy of *De [Hollandsche] Lelie* of 18 July. Thank heavens J.v.W. seems to be still sane and her correspondence to one of the journal readers confirmed our suspicion that we are dealing here with a very cruel campaign against her.

Poor dear lady, people can say whatever they like about her, we three Javanese will continue to believe in her and trust her: emancipationist and progressive ideas had always existed in me yet they always remained more or less a mystery to me until we got to read *De Lelie* and much of what I read there, and mainly the articles by J.v.W., clarified these mysteries for me, and awoke those ideas and energies still slumbering inside me. For that reason I am very grateful to her and will always remain so.

And then, don't I bless her for this correspondence with you, which is so heavenly.

Stella, believe me, if I – if we – ever achieve anything, in the sense in which you and I mean this, then you will have it on your conscience. I am not just writing this, I mean it with my whole heart. You have taught me a great deal and your encouragement is a wonderful support and a strength to me. I want to, and I shall, fight for my freedom. I want to, Stella, I want to, do you hear me? How will I ever be victorious if I do not fight? How will I ever find if I do not seek? Without a battle there can be no victory. I shall fight, Stella, I want

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[55] It was rumoured that Van Woude had tried to poison her husband from whom she soon after divorced. This account was deleted from *DDTL*.

to achieve my freedom. I am not concerned about obstacles and difficulties, I feel strong enough to overcome them, but there is one thing that concerns me terribly.

Stella, I have told you before that I love Father deeply and utterly. I do not know if I would have the courage to go through with my resolve if thereby I should break his heart which beats so warmly with love for us. I love him, infinitely, my old grey father, old and grey due to worry about us, for me. And if there has to be one of us who must become absolutely miserable, then let it be me. In this, too, there hides a certain egotism because I could never be happy, even were I free, even if independent and emancipated, if thereby I would make Father wretched.

But, are you not sketching the situation a little too sombrely? you may ask. Oh, if only that were true! I have even been optimistic by hinting at a possible outcome! Shall I tell you something? The life path of young Javanese girls is clearly marked out and formed according to only one model. We cannot have ideals—the only dream we may dream is, today or tomorrow, to become the umpteenth wife of some man or other. I defy someone to refute this.

On thinking about conditions in the Indies and in Europe and comparing them, you must admit that it is not one iota better there than here in as far as the morality of the men is concerned. And the women there suffer equally as here but with this difference: that women there, at least the vast majority, follow the man into the marriage boat of their own free will whereas, here, the women have no say, but are married off on the strength of their parents' or guardian's will with whomever these authority figures may approve of. In the Muslim world the agreement of the woman, yes, even the presence of the woman, is unnecessary in solemnizing the marriage. Father, for instance, could come home today and tell me: 'you are married to so and so'. I would then have to follow my husband, or I could refuse, but this would give the man the right to chain me to him for life without ever having to concern himself in the least about my welfare. I would be his wife, even if I did not follow him, and if he did not want to divorce me, then I would be bound to him for the rest of my life, while he remained free to do as he pleased, marry as many women as he wished, without giving me a thought. If Father should marry me off in such fashion, then I would simply end my life. But father would never do that.

God created the woman as the companion of the man, and the destiny of the woman is marriage. Good, it is not to be denied and I gladly acknowledge that, even centuries from now, women's greatest joy will continue to be to live in harmony together with a man! But how can one speak of an harmonious

union if our marriage laws are as the example I just described? Is it not natural that I should hate, despise marriage if it results in the inequality of women in such a gruesome way? No, fortunately, not every Muslim has four wives, but every married woman in our world knows that she may not be his only one and that sooner or later her beloved may bring her a companion who would have just as much claim on him as she has: according to Muslim law, she would also be his lawful wife. In the 'Government' regions women do not have to put up with as much as their sisters in the Principalities, Surakarta and Yogyakarta.[56] Here women are already miserable, coping with one, two or three co-wives of their husbands: in the Principalities, women regard this as child's play. There one would find hardly a single man who has only one wife: in aristocratic circles, especially at court, men have as many as twenty-six wives …

Should these conditions be allowed to continue, Stella? They have already become so accustomed to this that they take it for granted but that does not take away from the fact that those women suffer terribly as a result of this. Almost every woman I know here curses this right that men have. But wishes achieve nothing: something has to be done.

Come, women, young girls, stand up, let us join hands and let us work together to bring change to these unbearable conditions.

Yes, Stella, I did know that in Europe also the situation as regards the moral standards of men was deplorable. I join you in congratulating those young men who turn their backs on those ingrained habits which may corrupt them; and shame on those young girls of today who knowingly follow men whose lives are so debased. Truly, it is young mothers who can do most about this, as I have already witnessed here with my sisters.

I would like to have children boys and girls, to nurture them, to form them into people after my own heart. First and foremost, I would abolish that unfortunate habit of favouring boys at the expense of girls. We cannot be surprised at the egotism of the man when we realize how, as a child, he has been favoured above the girl, his sister. And, already as a child, the man learns to despise the girl. How often have I not heard mothers say to their sons, if they were crying after having fallen: 'Fie, fancy a boy crying just like a girl!'

I would teach my children, boys and girls, to regard each other as equals and give them precisely the same upbringing, naturally according to their

[56] The distinction is between the semi-autonomous regions still under the direct rule of the Sultan of Yogyakarta and the Susun of Solo and the rest of Java administered directly by the colonial government.

individual dispositions. I would not, for instance, just because I want to make a new woman of her, make my daughter study if she had neither interest nor talent for it; but I would never allow her to lack for anything in order to favour her brother – never!

And then I would also tear down the barriers between the sexes that are always erected between them with such ridiculous anxiety. I am convinced, if they were removed it would particularly benefit men. I can and will not believe that civilized and educated men intentionally avoid the companionship of women who are their equals in culture and education in order to throw themselves into the arms of unrespectable women. What prevents many men from frequenting the company of cultured female society is that a gentleman can never be a little friendly to a young woman without her contemplating marriage. Well, all of that would disappear if men and women could freely communicate with each other from when they were children.

You say: 'We girls can do a lot to bring men on to the right path but we are allowed to know so little of their lives'. All this will change in time but we must work, and work hard, otherwise that time will never come. We here in Java have only just arrived at the eve of the new day; must we first experience all the phases you have gone through, in order to come to the era in which you in Europe are now living?

* * * *

Amongst my latest treasures here is *Het Jongetje* by Borel.[57] A delightfully fine book; you are quite right! Many here consider it sentimental and terribly exaggerated, but I definitely do not agree. Sentimental it certainly is not, nor is it exaggerated. There may not be many such as Borel's 'little boy' but I know at least one, here, locally. The son of the assistant resident is the personification of Borel's 'little boy'. Once he said to Kardinah: 'Aunty, I'm so fond of girls. Girls can smile so delightfully. And they are so very, very different from boys, they are so sweet and soft.' This was said by a little fellow of five years of age. What do you think of that? Once he felt Kardinah's arm and then asked: 'Aunty, why are women so soft?' Feeling his own arm he continued, 'Even though I am still young, I am still a man, that is why I am so hard'.

Oh, he's such a sweet child, with large moist, dreamy eyes and brown, curly hair. Before he came here he saw our photographs at the home of friends

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[57] Henri Borel (1869–1933) *Het Jongetje* (1898) concerns a young boy who eventually loses his innocence and becomes a man. The Dutch writer was known for his interest in Chinese culture, about which he had written numerous well-regarded articles.

in Surabaya. His mother told him that those dear aunts lived in the place to which they were going. The little boy thought he had to get married and asked: 'Ma, must I marry all three or only one of them?' And when he came here and met us, his mother asked: 'Well, little fellow, have you made your choice? Which of the aunties will you marry?' 'Ma, I cannot choose, because they are all three equally lovely!' The little angel then said to each of us: 'I love you, I love you, I love you, yes, I love the whole world because everyone is good, everyone is dear to me!' If I had been told this by someone else I would probably not have believed it, but I saw and heard this with my own eyes and ears!

The topic that Mevrouw van Zuylen-Tromp[58] wanted addressed was 'the life of the native woman'. I would prefer not to write about this subject at the moment. I have so much to say on this subject that at the moment I could not possibly write a reasoned account. In a few years perhaps, when I have become wiser and calmer, I will attempt it. At the moment the thoughts I have on this subject are whirling and swirling through my head like falling leaves driven by the wind. What a comparison, eh?

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The mornings here are heavenly, as are the evenings, but around the middle of the day I would like to be able to lie in the water, as long as that also had not become lukewarm. How we enjoy these mornings, they are so wonderfully fresh and nature is so beautiful. At this time we wander through the garden where everything is blooming and fragrant. It is truly a joy to be outside in the mornings! The small garden bed, which we prepared and planted ourselves, is in flower. If only you could come and wander through it with us, or don't you like flowers and plants? Ma has her kitchen garden and we have our flower and rose garden.[59] This latter is situated in front of our room, and when the moon is full it can be so idyllic. One could get completely carried away. The sisters bring out their zithers, sit themselves down amongst the flowering asters and make music. How we romp and laugh and chatter after such a concert!

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58 She was president of Vereeniging Oost en West.

59 Kartini uses two Dutch terms to differentiate her birth mother (her father's first wife) Ibu Ngasirah, who is referred to as 'Moeder', and her stepmother, her father's official consort or *padmi*, Raden Ayu Moerjam, as 'Mama'. Her birth mother had eight children, her stepmother three. Ibu Ngasirah lived in a separate building at the rear of the main house and managed the household's domestic arrangements.

I was heartened by your indignation at the treatment which those two cultured and educated compatriots of mine experienced at the hands of many Europeans.[60] Believe me, it is not only ignorant people who carry on in such a ridiculous fashion towards the Javanese. I have often met people, who are definitely not ill-educated, yes, in fact belong to an intellectual aristocracy, but are so haughty and conceited that they are impossible to communicate with. It grieves me so terribly and only too frequently have we been made to feel that we Javanese are not really human beings. How do the Dutch actually expect us Javanese to become like them if they treat us like that? Love calls forth love in return, but contempt will never awaken love. We have many friends amongst the Dutch whom we thoroughly like, even more than friends of our own race. They have taken the trouble to get to know and understand us and they have come to love us. We are very fond of the Hollanders and are grateful to them for all the good things which they have taught us. We will never forget the one to whom we owe the awakening of our intellects and the nurturing of our spirit.[61]

The Dutch may then treat us unjustly but I will continue to be fond of them, we owe them so much! You can say what you like about the Javanese but never that they have no heart. They certainly are and they can certainly be grateful for what they may receive in intellectual or material form, even though their immobile faces indicate nothing of that which they feel intently. However, I do not actually have to convince you of that, you who regard all human beings, whatever their color, as equal to yourself.

Oh! I am so very, very, happy that I have been able to meet you. I will never let you go, Stella, I have come to love you so much that I cannot imagine what would happen if, God forbid, life should separate us. As if the infinite stretch of ocean did not already stand between us! But spirits who find each other in mutual understanding do not concern themselves about distance; they bridge the widest seas and most extensive lands to communicate with each other. Letters are a divine invention! Blessed the person who invented them!

The editor of the *Nederlandsche Taal* wrote me a very nice letter and told me, amongst other things, that if he gets sufficient subscribers it will be expanded into an illustrated weekly.[62] (It now comes out fortnightly). Roekmini, who is a good artist, can then make use of her talents. Shortly a small jewel of mine

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60 Kartini is apparently referring here to Stella's comment on Kartini's account of the treatment received by the two Dutch-educated Javanese men described in the letter of 13 January 1900.

61 This is a reference to Marie Ovink-Soer.

62 As revealed later, Mr Boes planned a new journal to which he invited Kartini and Roekmini to contribute. Its aim was to encourage the publication of Dutch language

will appear in *De Echo* (a description of the journey we undertook in May).[63] I receive this journal free from the editors.

A week ago we had a visit from the Director of Education, Religion and Industry and his spouse from Batavia … and Stella, rejoice with me, the Director came here specifically to ask Father personally about his opinions on a proposal that he wanted to present to the government shortly; namely the establishment of schools for native girls![64] At the time I was ill and felt terrible, not only from physical pain, but also from spiritual suffering. Stella, at that time I believed that my dream of freedom was coming to an end[65] – and then Father gave me that letter from the Director in which he asked to speak to Papa and explained what it was he wanted to discuss. What a joy that letter was to me, it completely revived me! It was so heartening to know that over there in Batavia one of the high officials of the Government had a heart firstly for the Javanese and secondly for the Woman! When, a little later Mama came in to see me, she found her daughter in tears. Oh, I was so happy, so grateful! I had to, I would get better, because I wanted to speak to him, if only to express words of gratitude to him.

And he did come … not alone … his wife accompanied him![66] Oh! Stella, never in our lives have we experienced such a meeting, *a meeting of heart and soul with these important people*. I had already developed a deep regard for him when I knew why he was coming. And that regard increased when I saw him riding into our grounds; he was sitting in the front seat, his wife was sitting in the back with Father, who had met them at the station. I knew that Father would only have sat in that spot on his insistence. For you, this may only seem a matter of formal politeness, nothing more, and you can laugh at me, Stella, but it touched me deeply. It spoke to me of the straightforwardness of the Director and … that the conceit which affects almost every official here without exception was something foreign to him. I am so used to seeing Father on the left of a resident or assistant resident, no matter how much younger they may be than Father. Not only I, but even Europeans are ashamed at the stupid

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writing by Western-educated Javanese. Similarly motivated Dutch language publications for and by Western-educated Indonesians that followed, *Bandera Wolanda* (1901) and *Bintang Hindia* (1902) were published in the Netherlands.

63 This would appear to be 'Een Gouverneur Generaals Dag' (A Governor General's Day), which describes the celebration in Semarang that Kartini attended. Kartini later dismisses the pieces as mere nonsense but it provides a good insight into an idealised versio of her life. (See Part Three below.)

64 See Kartini's extended account of her meeting with the Abendanons in Part Two.

65 See the dispirited letter Kartini wrote to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer in August 1900.

66 This episode is described in detail in Kartini's letters to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri, written in August 1901.

and exaggerated emphasis on rank here which determines that, at official gatherings, European officials and regents sit on chairs, while for long-serving wedonos the cold floor, perhaps covered with a bamboo mat, perhaps not, is considered sufficient. The most minor European official has the right to sit on a chair, while native officials below the rank of regent of whatever age, origin or expertise, are directed to sit on the floor when Europeans are present. It is certainly no joy to see how a grey-haired wedono must crawl along the floor in front of the kanjeng tuan aspirant, a mere stripling who has barely left the school benches. But enough of this – that is the reason why the gesture of politeness by the Director, who is a very high official, touched me so much.

I said this later to his wife. She and her husband have a reputation in Batavia for being very proud, but I noticed nothing of this. It was utter simplicity which we observed. They are not ordinary people. This is the point, and therefore they do not mix with everyone. Just ask your cousin whether he would not prefer to avoid the large majority of the European public here in the Indies.[67] Everyone here is '*mijnheer*' and '*mevrouw*' but if a servant wears the finest of luxury clothes and if a kitchen maid puts on the most elegant gown, he is not therefore a gentleman and she is therefore not a lady. And you do not meet many of that type of person here, and then there are the so-called Indo-Europeans, amongst whom there are very many dear, honest people but most are not.[68]

We heard the Director say to Father: 'I have been everywhere in Java and have spoken to several rulers, Regent. You have set an example in sending girls to school. I have personally asked young girls who are still going to school if they would like to continue their studies and they have all answered enthusiastically, "Yes!"' He then asked how Father would like a girls' school to be organized and where a trial school of this kind should be established – in West, Central or East Java.

Oh! Stella, how my ears and eyes sparkled and my heart beat with joy on hearing all this! So – at last – a light will be brought into our poor, dark world of women!

While Mijnheer was speaking to Father, the Mevrouw engaged herself with us. With what joy we sat listening to her! She is a modern woman, and first-rate, like my own Stella. A Spaniard by birth, she had an English mother and was raised in England. She is involved in the women's movement with heart and soul, her husband also. An ideal couple, oh, how happy I am to

67 The reference suggests that Stella had a relative in the colony which probably explains Stella's interest.

68 There was widespread prejudice amongst both 'white' Europeans and Javanese against lower-class European settlers of mixed parentage. For Kartini's contact with an 'Indo', see Kartini to EC Abendanon 21 November 1902.

have met them. How wonderfully she dismisses the ridicule voiced by many that only disappointed old spinsters and unhappily married women join the women's movement to take their revenge on the man who did not ask her and who made her unhappy. She is happy, not only as a mother (she has three grown-up sons in Holland) but is also deeply, completely happy as a woman. Her husband, highly cultured in heart and soul, adores her and has such a high regard for women that he wishes he was a genius only in order to create something magnificent in her honour.[69] She said to me that she had told him: 'Husband, do not think that I owe you obedience, I obey you only because I love you.' Stella, that evening, my thoughts drifted north where I know a woman, my friend, who thinks as she does. She and he were married as free and equal people. My Stelly was constantly in and around me.

She explained her husband's goal to us and asked what I thought of it. 'It is a heavenly idea, Mevrouw, which would be a blessing for native society if it eventuated; and that blessing would be greater if those girls were also given the opportunity to prepare themselves for some kind of vocation which would enable them to make their own way through life when, as a result of their education, they may no longer wish to return to their traditional society. The young girl who is mentally developed, whose perceptions have been broadened, will no longer be able to live in her ancestral world. She will have been taught what freedom is, and she will be placed in a prison; she will have been taught to fly, and she will be locked up in a cage. No, the really educated woman could not possibly feel satisfied in native society while it remains as it is. There is, till now there exists but one way for the Native girl to make her way through life and that is 'marriage'. And what married life is in native society will not be unknown to you, who has been in Java so long. Oh, we think it is heavenly that your husband wants to provide education and culture to young girls but, along with that, let there also be vocational training and, then, the blessing that your husband wants to bring to the native world will truly be a blessing!'

'Husband, did you hear that?' she asked her husband enthusiastically. 'This young lady is asking for vocational training for native girls.' Surprised, he looked at me and asked: 'Really, are you asking for vocational training for girls? How would you arrange that? Please, tell me, what would you like to become? A doctor?' I felt all eyes upon me, especially those of my parents bored into my face. I lowered my eyes. It roared and thundered in my ears but above it all your words sounded: 'Kartini, be strong, do not waver!'

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[69] Jacques Abendanon married Rosa (or Rosita as her family refer to her as) in 1883. It was her first marriage and they had no children.

'Please, tell us, what would you like to become? Oh, I know, you would like to become a writer but for that you do not need specific training. You can become a writer by yourself.'[70]

I am, alas, too old for study but I must not, nevertheless, look back, must I? I must 'raise my eyes and simply march forward'.[71] Stella, Stella, do not let me go, hold my hand in yours, lead me; from you comes a power which takes hold of me, do not leave me! If something is ever to come of me, it will be the result of what you have done, dearest!

Mevrouw spoke with me for quite a while about many things and about what you and I have discussed so often: 'the woman'. When we parted that evening to retire for bed she took my hands in both of hers, pressed them warmly and said: 'My friend, we shall return to this subject. I will write to you often and at length, will you do the same for me? Tell me all, tell me everything.'

The next morning we accompanied her for part of her way and in the three hours that we spent with her in the carriage and in the tram,[72] we – she and I – discussed many things together. Even though it was already 12 o'clock when we had parted the previous evening, she had, nevertheless, already told her husband everything that she knew about us. 'Oh, Regent,' she exclaimed from time to time, 'please let your daughters come with me, let them come with me to Batavia. Please, let this young lady stay with me, I will come to fetch her myself.'

And Father said to her that he had been thinking of coming to Batavia within the year, 'but for now she will stay home with Mama, Mevrouw!' The 'she' referred to me; was it serious or in jest?

She wanted us in Batavia so that we could argue our cause and the interests of our Native women before the important people in person. Oh, Stella, if it should come to that, I hope I shall be able to plead our cause well. Mevrouw is going to Buitenzorg to request an audience with Mevrouw Rooseboom[73] to tell her about the Javanese girls. And Mr Abendanon will go to the Governor

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70 Abendanon would have been aware of Kartini's earlier published writing, which would have attracted public attention. However, in this exchange it appears that Abendanon had not considered the idea of vocational training for girls and Kartini's thinking here is clearly in advance of what Abendanon had in mind.

71 Here and in the earlier quotation Kartini is evidently quoting from Stella's letter to her.

72 To return to the colonial capital, Batavia, the Abendanons would have had to take a carriage to Kudus and from there a steam tram to Semarang to either catch a train or board a ship to Batavia.

73 This was the wife of Governor General Rooseboom (1900–04). Lieutenant-General Rooseboom, former member of the Dutch parliament and aligned to the progressive liberal grouping. A 'pre-ethical policy' appointment, while personally interested in policy reform, Rooseboom was appointed specifically to pursue colonial expansion

General to plead the cause of the Javanese. (Mr Abendanon is a graduate in law[74]). At our parting, Mevrouw said to me: 'Be brave, keep up your courage and confidence. It must not remain like this; something must and will be done about it. Be brave!'

Stella, am I dreaming or am I awake? Is there really a way out for us? May we hope that our dream does have a chance of coming true? I learned even much more. She told me much more, but I do not dare tell you. At the moment it is still so far away, but it does sparkle and gleam before me. Later, later, Stella dearest, when I am already holding it in my arms, firmly, firmly embraced so that it cannot escape me, you will come to know what it is. I asked my sisters, am I still alive, because I feel so indescribably wonderful and happy! Pray for me, dearest, that this is not some illusion, some pale hallucination! Because, oh, that would be terrible! I had better not become too excited by it because it is still so uncertain, something could go wrong, and the disappointment would be terrible.[75]

Mevrouw told me that she has long had a plan to come to visit us in Jepara. She had heard of us so often[76] and we had also been recommended to her by Dr Snouck Hurgronje, the Islamic scholar and Adviser on Native Affairs and the right-hand man of the Governor General. You will already have heard of him; the man who for the sake of his studies spent a year disguised as an Arab in Mecca and who left that place almost at the cost of his life when it was discovered that he was Christian. As I have heard, he later converted to Islam and married a highly educated daughter of a Penghulu. We wondered what caused Dr Snouck Hurgronje to recommend us to our new friends, we do not know him at all except by name. But stranger things happen on this earth.[77]

The assistant teacher here will shortly be going to Europe and, don't you think this is kind of the Director, in his place he will appoint a female teacher.

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and secure its defences. This, and the broader aims of the ethical policy were only achieved by his successor, another military officer with reformist leanings, General van Heutz.

74 Abendanon's colonial career began as a law official in 1876, including a period in Pati in the neighbourhood of Jepara.

75 This repeats earlier descriptions of her first meeting with Rosa but includes the implication that Kartini might gain financial support from the colonial government.

76 Kartini's name may have been known in Batavia because of her involvement in the 1898 National Women's Exhibition and the letter she had written to the Dutch Queen at that time but the Condronegoro family as a whole was considered to be 'close' to the colonial administration and well known in official circles.

77 Kartini's account indicates how well known Snouck Hurgronje's involvement in colonial politics was. She appears positive about his conversion to Islam – in contrast to later comments in her letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri 22 April 1902.

He will send us a Dutch lady, age is not an issue, but she must be a cultured and educated woman who can be of much assistance to us.[78] This is what he is able to do for us immediately and then, oh Stella, when he saw our artwork here, painting, embossing work etc. etc., he asked whether it might be possible in a year's time to arrange an exhibition. He sincerely regretted that we had not participated in the French exhibition.[79] And the following morning he said that he would speak with some influential people in Batavia about the possibility of holding an exhibition of Native craft work there next year. 'You must send in a lot representing everything we have seen here.'[80]

Oh, Stella, I was unable to say anything; I merely looked at him and her with tears in my eyes. How have we deserved such goodness, so much love, such good fortune? We had never met before this. We were living as if in a dream, there was no yesterday, no tomorrow for us, there was only a wonderful present, full of happiness! So many wonderful things made me dizzy, made me frightened—oh, the reaction would be frightening if the ideas and dreams we now hold went up in smoke.

Having returned home, I immediately took up my pen to write a joyous letter to our friend Mevrouw Ovink, because several days earlier she had received a cry of desperation from me, and my dear moedertje needed to know that her little daughter was happy once more. I told her nothing of what I have written here, only that I felt indescribably happy and was filled with a love for life. But I have told you everything with the exception of that one matter, because you are entitled to it since, after all, it will be the result of your efforts if everything turns out in my favour. Your moral support kept me standing when I was desperate, your encouragement strengthened me when I felt weak. Stella, if ever I am able to do something for my sisters in Java then it is solely and entirely through and with your help.

I have already told you that Mevrouw ter Horst had made the pages of her periodical available to me to plead the interests of native women. She promised me anonymity and even suggested to me the way in which I could structure my treatment of the subject. It could take the form of 'a conversation between two regent's daughters'. On her part, she will do everything to

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78 This was the young teacher, Anneke Glaser, who became a close friend.

79 The reference is to the Paris World Exhibition of 1900 where the Dutch exhibition included a large colonial exhibit including replicas of Hindu temples and traditional architecture. A local exhibition of 'native arts and crafts' was held in Batavia in 1902.

80 As Director for Native Industry, Abendanon outlined a proposal for funding the development of Native crafts as a means of stimulating Native economy to solve the problems of declining Native welfare in Java in a major report in 1904. This was rejected as impractical.

promote the good cause, I have only to tell her how. I have received Father's permission for this.[81]

Oh, Stella, Stella, I am being provided with so much! God grant that I can bring it about. Support me, strengthen me, my friend. Write to me often, often Stella. As an exercise I wrote some sketches, just ordinary things, events in our own lives. One has already appeared in *De Echo*;[82] as a pseudonym I chose 'Tiga Saudara' (three sisters) because we three are one. It was quickly discovered who we – 'Tiga Saudara' – were and I received a compliment for my work in *De Locomotief* (a newspaper here in the Indies). I was annoyed – I would have preferred to keep it a secret. I really dislike being asked about it. It may be considered an affectation but, truly, I dislike being given compliments. But the report in the newspaper also had its positive side, and quite a good one at that, because, you see, last month, Father was sent two editions of a new periodical for natives with a request to pass them to us, together with a letter with a request that the 'Tiga Saudara' support it. It is the first Dutch journal established for natives. Wish me luck with the appearance of this periodical. I expect much good to come from *Nederlandsche Taal* for my compatriots, for us natives. It is in the style of our *Lelie*! – Dutch flower, your fragrance and beauty penetrates as far away as the distant Indies! *De Echo* and now the *Nederlandsche Taal*! You can understand that I wrote an enthusiastic letter to the editor and founder (he is director of the school for the training of Native rulers at Probolinggo) and offered my services to the paper.[83] And just a little while ago I received a letter in which he listed the topics he would like me to deal with. And imagine, Stella, the first one I read was 'Native Education for Girls'. After that – 'A Native Institution' and 'Javanese Art'.

'Kartini, do not say, I am not able; say, I will!' I will Stella, I will, I will attempt it, Stella. I sincerely hope you have not overestimated my abilities. I will do my best.

Now I want to tell you something else, and that is that we three have begun to learn French from the books by Servaas de Bruin.[84] We have already struggled through about four books and have now come to ask you to give me the names of some simple French books (not text books). Pa also gave us, as a present, a study course in German but, if we ever finish with French, then

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81 Kartini had visited her on the way back from Batavia in 1900.

82 Two stories were published in *De Echo*, 'Een Oorlogsschip op de Ree' (A Warship at Anchor) and 'Een Gouverneur Generaals Dag' (A Governor General's Day), both extended and fictionalized accounts of events reported in correspondence. (See Part Three below.)

83 See also letter to Stella Zeehandelaar 23 August 1900 above.

84 Servaas de Bruin (1821–1901) published a two-volume French dictionary (1873–79) and was author of many books including a geographic encyclopedia.

we hope to begin rather with English; German can come later, if we are still alive, that is. We are at the moment trying to read French illustrated papers, but reading and understanding are two distinct things, are they not? In the beginning we made the silliest translations but gradually it is getting better. We are full of optimism. Roekmini once declared that she dreamed in French; she was with Chateaubriand in Louisiana, that spectacularly beautiful country that he has described.[85] The French language has much in common with ours with regard to sentence construction and also the letter 'h' is precisely like ours.

Our new friend said to her husband: 'She would so like to study languages. Oh, husband, how I would like to take on that task.' Yesterday I received a letter from her – 20 pages long. How delightfully she writes. She says that she feels she will be speaking to us again and she puts her faith in that feeling. I am helping her believe. 'Put your faith in the future!' she wrote to me. And I do, as long as I know that both you and she are at my side! Her letter made me ashamed, just as yours did at the time; you and she think so well of me. Oh, I do so hope that I do not disappoint those who have such faith in me! That is a cry that arises in my heart as a deep, silent prayer.

And yet, oh, Stella, life is so full of riddles and mysteries. People are so changeable. Do not always blame this on a weak character; circumstances may arise in life that may seemingly turn even a hero into a coward. Do not prejudge, however mean or cowardly an action may appear, before you know what the motives for it are.

I have experienced so much in these last few days. What a range of emotions touched my inner being. First I was almost desperate because, on the basis of certain things, I drew the conclusion that my dream of freedom would be buried deep in the ground and that I would have to do that against which I had set my whole being.[86] Then the friends came from Batavia and a heavenly feeling of happiness came over me that made me dizzy and overwhelmed me. I lived in a state of ecstasy! But with frightening cruelty I was woken from that by a grief so heavy that I thought I would not be able to breathe any longer. It did not relate to me but to one whom I love with all my heart. I groaned and moaned in despair.[87]

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85 François-René Chateaubriand (1768–1848). Presumably the reference is to his most well-known publication, *Voyage en Amerique* (1827).

86 In a letter to Mevrouw Abendanon (7 October 1900), Kartini revealed that she believed a marriage was being arranged for her.

87 The reference here may be to plans being made for the marriage of her younger sister. The first clear reference to this marriage is in a letter to Mevrouw Abendanon on 20 November 1901.

Oh, why? Why? Must happiness and sorrow follow each other so quickly? I could not think, only feel this unbearable pain here in my heart. It has now subsided, and I can once again give a true account of myself.

Poor, dear father, he has suffered so terribly and life constantly brings him new and painful disappointments. Stella, there is nothing so important to Father as his children. We are everything to him, his happiness and his comfort. I greatly love my freedom, oh, it is everything to me, and the fate of my sisters is a concern very close to my heart. I would do much for them and I am prepared to make any sacrifice that might advance this cause. I regard it as my life's joy to be able to dedicate myself to their happiness. But my father is dearer to me than all of this together.

Stella, call me cowardly, irresolute, but I can do nothing else: should Father oppose it, that I commit myself to that [search for freedom], no matter how my heart may weep, I shall acquiesce! I do not have the courage to wound that heart, that loyal heart that beats so warmly for me any further, to cause more blood to flow. It has bled enough even though I have been totally innocent of causing it.

You say that you cannot understand that someone must marry. You continually contrast 'must' with 'I want'. If it related to others I would certainly do the same but I could not do so towards my Father, especially not now, now that I know what an unbearably heavy sorrow he has experienced. What I would have to do I would not regard as a 'must', but as something which I would take upon myself voluntarily for 'him'.

I write, paint and do everything because it gives my Father pleasure. I shall work hard and do my best to achieve something worthwhile because thereby I will please him. Stella, you may call it silly, exaggerated of me but I can do no other. Father is so unutterably dear to me! I would be so grief-stricken if Father should oppose my emancipation plans, but I would be even more sorrowful if my most earnest goals were fulfilled, but, at the same time, I had to lose my Father's love. Oh, I do not believe I should ever lose it, I do not believe that, but I could break his heart. Perhaps, were it to concern someone else, he could bear disappointment more easily but from me it would affect him terribly because he may be a little fonder of me than of the others. And he is so dear to me! Don't you think it strange; hardly any one gives me hurt and yet I suffer constantly. Oh, taking things so very much to heart, that is suffering, and yet I would not be different; even though my heart may bleed many times, sometimes it gives me such indescribable joy, in a way no coolly rational person could ever imagine.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri[88]

(5 September)

But I have received your letter in which you asked me to write you when approximately we would come to you … Oh Mevrouw, the letters danced before my eyes. I could not believe what I read! It is then not a dream? We will see you again? And in your home! I do not know what I feel … I cannot think – it is roaring in my ears. We think it is a heavenly, wonderful prospect to see you again and so soon already … and yet we are fearful.

6 Sept. Yesterday I was incapable of writing any more, I am just crazy with happiness. It is as though since yesterday we are no longer living on this earth – we are unwittingly living in a dream! We did know that we would be travelling one of these days but not that it would be to Batavia, to you – to see our dear Angel! That dear father of ours – Oh, you do not know how good he is – but let me not speak about him, my everything, otherwise my letter will never be finished. When we are with you we will chatter on about everything!

Pa, Ma and we three will fly to Batavia to pay you both our respects. We three politely and kindly seek your hospitality and our parents will stay at a hotel. We could not all stay with you could we? And three is already terribly many.

We are coming in the course of next week – overland.[89] Have I not bored you terribly with this long letter? The sequel to the story we will tell you ourselves. It does not matter that Batavia has resumed its ordinary state of things – after all we are not coming to see the festivities – we are coming to visit you – and this is a joy so great that we would gladly give up 20 years of our lives for it.

I had better not write anything more, besides I would not be able to – because here (inside me) it is so full. We are going to Paradise my heart exalts in ecstasy! We are happy and yet we feel ourselves so oppressed, why, oh why? Oh foolish hearts! Please make fun of our childishness. Will you do this when we are with you? Such a good showering off is necessary for us from time to time otherwise we would go crazy, big children that we are, despite our age.

But now really I am ending. To you both our respectful and heartfelt regards and we thank you for your wonderfully long letter. We remain yours respectfully,

Kartini, Roekmini, Kardinah

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88 This is the continuation of her letter of August 1900 that included the story of her childhood.

89 The family appeared to have travelled by train. The alternative was to travel by sea from Semarang.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Buitenzorg, 24 September 1900

My dear kind Angel,

Just a few words to let you know of our safe arrival in Buitenzorg. It cost us a great deal to part from you dearest! Not for one moment since we left that friendly, hospitable house on Kebon Sirih have you been out of our thoughts.[90] How comfortable we were there, how attentive and caring you were for us, we will never be able to forget all that, the week spent at K.S. will remain with us for the rest of our lives. We were so happy staying with our Angel.

Thank you, a thousand times, thank you, for all the kindness and love. Sad and sorrowful we sat in the train to Buitenzorg where we found Messieurs Staal and de Booij[91] at the station who informed us that His Exc. was expecting us that evening and had done us the honor of asking us to dinner. At the palace we met Heer and Mevrouw Kroesen.[92] When we saw Heer Kroesen we thought of his colleague, Heer H. Siccama,[93] and had to smile for a moment because the pickled assem was affecting our head.

This morning we opened the tin of sweet things with which you sent us off and guiltily savoured all those delicious things. We are enjoying our stay here in Buitenzorg. The climate is wonderful and the people we meet are kind and friendly to us but, despite all this, we miss Kebon Sirih and its Kalong very, very much.[94] Our hearts are drawn to that Paradise where our dear Angel reigns. We constantly see her dear face before us. How we miss her soft, warm hand.

At the moment we are sitting on the rear veranda of the hotel Belle Vue.[95] If only you were with us, how you would enjoy the wonderful landscape that stretches below us! We gaze at it constantly. This morning we went with the de Booij family to the national botanic gardens.[96] Mijnheer had taken his camera and took several snaps of us. Mevrouw is a dear, sweet little woman and their child, a boy of about 2 years of age, is a delight. We had a wonderful time wrestling with the blond angel.

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90 The address of the Abendanons in Batavia, today the centre of Jakarta's tourist district.

91 Hendrick (Han) de Booij was adjutant to the Governor General. Colonel Staal was a senior military officer.

92 This is probably JC Kroesen (1840–1909), member of the Council of the Indies.

93 LTh Hora Siccama was chairman of the exhibition committee in Batavia.

94 'Kalong' (literally meaning 'bat') had presumably become an accepted nickname for the family.

95 The Belle Vue hotel in Buitenzorg (Bogor)

96 The meeting, at the governor-general's residence, was described by Hilda de Booij in a letter of 8 October 1900 to her mother (see Introduction). The following day Kartini and her sisters visited various places of interest including the insane asylum.

And now goodbye, my own dear Angel! Once again our heartfelt thanks for everything and everything – when we have returned to our own forgotten little corner, you will receive a long letter. Our fondest regards to you both and a warm hand ?

From the one who loves you dearly,
K.

PS Kleintje has eaten her plate clean.

Our regards to the dear Cohen-Stuart family when you see them.[97] We go to bed and get up with your dear blessings! Goodbye! All my love.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

7 October 1900

My dearest Mevrouw

Just 2 weeks ago today we departed from the house of our dear Angel with a heart full of gratitude for all the dear and fine things we enjoyed and experienced and of indescribable sadness for the separation from our beloved hostess and host. We are deeply grateful for the heavenly days spent with you, for all the experiences that you enabled us to enjoy in Batavia and above all for the friendship and care both of you gave, which is beyond all praise.

My dear, dear Angel, how difficult it was for me to take your hand for the last time – to look at your dear kind, deeply-caring eyes from which a world of love streamed out to me. Oh! How I could hold that small, warm hand for ever, for the rest of my life, hear that sweet voice in my ears, sometimes bantering, teasing, and then again serious, supportive, reprimanding – or alternatively comforting, sympathetic – uplifting – when the child is despondent or desperate!

I see again before me that dear, friendly, and so very tastefully and comfortably established home in Kebon Sirih, where the two noble, superior people live for whom our hearts are so full of love, respect and admiration. How fond I am of you my dear, dear angel, so much, so infinitely much! I see before me once again, the way you stood that last moment before our departure – with a cup in your hand – the cup of tea which you, considerate Moedertje, had

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97 Mevrouw Cohen Stuart was Abendanon's sister, Marianne Josephine Abendanon. The reference is to Abendanon's brother-in-law and close colleague, JWT Cohen Stuart (1854–1908), Director of the Department of Justice. His father, Abraham Benjamin Cohen Stuart also a colonial official, was recognized for his work in translating Malay and Javanese manuscripts.

prepared for the 'child' but which the ungrateful thing had left untouched. Forgive her, dearest, her heart was so full and her throat felt as though it had been screwed shut, with the best will in the world she could not have swallowed anything, other than … her tears.

I relive all these moments and my heart hurts! How unspeakably happy we felt there with you! We were very, very happy! We have seen you once again, we have been with you. We had never dreamed that this would ever happen! We have been in Paradise and have now returned to earth. The wonderfully beautiful dream has passed; it ended in the way beautiful dreams must end, very poetically: with sparkling lights, the perfume of flowers and the sweet sounds of the gamelan! The house that had been undergoing repairs had on our return been put back in order – gloriously lit up and wherever we looked we saw flowers! For this most wonderful homecoming we had to thank the Assistant Resident. Our brother had also prepared us a surprise – he had turned our room into a flower garden. That dear sweet boy, his eyes shone with such happiness for us, his whole face shone with pleasure, he was as excited as a child and all that just because he was seeing us again after a 'terrible' separation of 18 days. We were moved by such emotion and it made us feel wonderfully good. You can imagine how we were questioned about everything; we had to tell of all our experiences until we could no longer speak from tiredness! Whose names were referred to time and time again with affection, respect and enthusiasm you can surely guess, can't you? We will never, never be able to say enough about the 'Kalongs family'!

And oh, what a wonderful surprise from Mijnheer: a beautiful and realistic photograph of your highly esteemed Husband that awaited us at our house was the pinnacle of all the many wonderful surprises at our homecoming! Many thanks for it! We are very, very pleased with it and are most appreciative of that most charming thought! As a special favour we have asked father if the photograph can remain with us for the time being. As soon as the suitcases were unpacked the sisters tidied up our bookcase – that contains the most priceless treasures we possess and is the repository of so many keepsakes and cherished souvenirs. They tidied up the top shelf a little – filled with all kinds of odds and ends – and there, between the flowers, Mijnheer is enshrined, and, a little further on, leaning against a small basket, our Angel looks down at us. I could not tell you how many times a day our already flat noses are further flattened against the glass panes of our bookcase to look at the photograph of a certain 'hated' person!

But the dream has ended dearest, we have returned to reality – coarse, shocking and cruel!

The day after our return, our parents were informed that certain people would come here – the following morning in fact – and leave again the same afternoon. This piece of news we heard not at home from our parents but from others who we were visiting. Apparently they did not have the heart to announce the visit of … the parents of a person about whom we were speaking on that unforgettable evening when Mijnheer rode to the Concordia with our parents and you sat with us three in the dark corner waiting for a vehicle. They live a long way away and had for some time been staying with their family not far from here. Only the father came to see us, the mother, due to a sudden illness, was prevented from coming. I had already told you, had I not, that they were blood relatives? We had to take our guest as far as the station and when he left and when our parents paid a visit the following morning to his family, we had to accompany them. It was suggested that it would be hardly friendly of us were we not to come to visit uncle and aunt – they had come such a distance. I had made no protest and sweetly followed along regardless of how it boiled and foamed inside me, I said not a word – I did not want to spoil my case at the outset by the premature expression of opinion. After all, no one had said anything to me yet. I am calmly biding my time, when it arrives people will know I am no spineless object, but a person with a head and heart – who thinks and feels.

The four parents had a lengthy discussion in another room; what was being discussed there I can only guess and Mama's happy expression when the conference had finished confirmed what I had surmised. I can imagine that Ma is overjoyed with the prospect that one of us will be properly taken care of.[98] A marvelous catch indeed! To make one's mouth water! A young heir apparent, (probably successor to his father as regent) himself already holding the second highest position in the Native Civil Service ladder, extremely rich parents as well, and perhaps even reasonably educated![99] What more could one want! That the gentleman is married with wife and children has nothing to do with it! One of those unfortunates for whom the provision of a stepmother was being negotiated had accompanied the grandparents. Poor thing, what awaits your poor little mother? Does she yet know that her master – her husband – was looking for a mistress; for her – a competitor? But do not worry, dear

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98 The allusion here is to a marriage arrangement. It was practice for parents to arrange a visit where families (and the prospective couple) could surreptitiously 'see' the intended. Kartini assumed she was the object. The girls were 'displayed' at this visit. As it transpired, her younger sister was married to this prospective groom in January the following year.

99 RMTA Reksonegoro was Patih of Pekalong at the time and later succeeded his father as Bupati of Tegal. As Kartini notes he was already married but now 'required' a *padmi* (a wife as formal consort) of aristocratic standing.

heart, I shall not cause your poor mother, who has never hurt me, who does not even know me, any harm – it will not be me who will force her from her rightful position!

And, as though all this was not enough we received on the fourth day after our arrival home a letter from our brother in Holland which broke my heart. My poor boy, my only love, what do you ask of us: 'Comfort our dear parents, remain their source of happiness!' God knows how gladly I would do so, how I would love nothing better than to conjure up a sunny laugh on their dear faces. My poor brother – that he should write to us just now in this vein! I will send you his letter, and then tell you everything, the whole story.[100] At the moment I am unable to, it is still raging so violently inside me. I cannot keep my thoughts together.

You already know a lot about me, but far from everything. It will not be easy for me to tell you everything, but it must be done – only when you know everything can you help. As yet you have been able to probe barely half of the wound that is festering inside my heart. It is terribly egotistical of me to make you a participant of everything I carry around inside of me – for me it will bring relief but for you … grief. There, you see what I give to those who are well disposed towards me? Oh, I would like to call out to you, just because I am so very, so deeply fond of you: 'Leave me be – withdraw from me! – ban me from your thoughts – from your heart – forget me! Let me wrestle on my own!' – because, oh God!, you do not know the wasps' nest you will find yourself in by reaching a hand out to me! You had best leave me alone! Just let me be grateful that I have met you in such a spirit of mutual affection – that you have crossed my life's path and brought light and flowers to it. Let our meeting be like that of ships on the wild ocean that pass each other in the dark of night. A meeting – a happy greeting – a brief reflection in the watery mirror and then nothing more!

But I fear – I know, that you cannot do this, even if you wanted to. Let me speak of it no more – I am merely insulting your great and noble heart. It pains me so to know that all those who are fond of me, grieve for me. Father is unwell – I know that it is not just from tiredness caused by the trip. A loving eye sees clearly when it concerns her loved one and I can read the suffering of the soul on the face that I love. Father suffers – for Kartono and Kartini – God! God! Must my poor Father experience nothing but suffering from his children? Father loves me, very, very much, perhaps he loves me a little more than the others. He understands me completely, knows everything I am thinking and feeling – even though I have never spoken to him of it.

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[100] See below Kartini to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, 21 December 1900.

And I am entirely convinced that, were it in his power, he would not hesitate for a moment to give me what I regard as my greatest happiness – 'freedom and independence'. Must he not be suffering endlessly, appreciating, knowing and understanding my feelings – knowing himself to be powerless to give his child her life's wish. I am not his only child – others have demands on him – he has to fulfil his obligations to others as well as to his children. Father suffers more than me when he has to cause me this suffering. It breaks my heart when I see his preoccupied face! Oh God! How furiously I wish I could kiss all that suffering from his eyes – but I cannot!

Ask me everything, my dearest, but not this: 'Will I ever marry?' I cannot. I do not want to. I will not do it even if the whole world were to stand on its head! What will then become of me, God only knows – but Raden Ayu – to be Raden Ayu, never, never! What have I not seen and heard in the Preanger that has brought my blood to the boil – my heart shivered with indignation and sorrow! There is an only granddaughter of a Regent, an orphan, 17 years old, cultured, educated, and extremely rich (the apple of her grandparents' eye, both of whom are still alive) – married to a man who has about three wives, children and even a grandchild! We made the acquaintance of the mother of this grandchild – a really sweet child-wife of 17 years, who has been Raden Ayu for 4 years already. Thank God it is a happy marriage, it was a free choice! But that poor stepmother-in-law, step-grandmother and 4th wife … God! God! God! Must these circumstances endure forever? Must the woman then be humiliated and downtrodden forever?

No! No! There must be a beginning to the end of it! A beginning to the end must be made, it must.

Some time ago, speaking with Mama about matters concerning women I made it clear for the umpteenth time that nothing appealed to me and attracted me more – I desired nothing more passionately – than to lead my own life (what I think about marriage is no secret to Mama, I certainly do not hide my views about it behind the furniture.) Mama said: 'But there is no one amongst us yet who does that!'

'Then it is time someone did.'

'But do you realize that all beginnings are difficult? That any initiator has a hard lot in life? That non-acceptance, disappointment upon disappointment, ridicule, await you – do you realize all that?'

'I know it. These ideas did not just come to me today or yesterday, they have been living inside me already for years.'

'And what would you gain from it for yourself? Will it give you satisfaction? Make you happy?'

'I know the path I wish to follow is difficult, full of thorns, thistles, potholes, it is rocky, bumpy, slippery – it has not been surveyed. And even if I should not be so fortunate as to achieve my end goal, if I should succumb halfway, I should die happy because then the way would have been opened and I would have helped carve out the road which leads to freedom and emancipation of the Native woman. It would already be a great pleasure for me if parents of other girls who also want to be independent, would no longer have to say: there is no one amongst us who has done that.'

Strange – but I definitely do not feel afraid, frightened or apprehensive – I am calm and full of courage – only that silly, foolish heart hurts very, very much.

The piece enclosed herewith is from *Verbonden Schakels*[101] – Kleintje has copied it out for you, will you read it?

The sisters will write to you shortly and you will hear more from me very soon I hope. My talisman always hangs around my neck – I do not take it off – it will go with me everywhere, everywhere – through thick and thin till … the grave!

Tut! tut! What a sombre, nasty thought. Life is worth living! How will we be able to conquer if we do not first struggle? 'And in struggling, we gain strength.' 'And while roaming we will find the signs' sings De Genestet[102] so truly.

Kleintje is enjoying the porridge – she adores it. She is a little annoyed that now she is always hungry. She will – must and shall – get stronger, our little one – she too wants to flap her wings and learn to 'fly'.

The charming little vases and the flowerpot holder attract everyone's admiration – we once again thank you very much for them, dearest. The little Cupid is safely behind lock and key in the glass cabinet – that cheeky boy should not be able to get out to sow unrest in the hearts of young girls who are restless enough without having come into contact with the arrow of Amors! Yesterday it was a beautiful moonlit night, we played in the garden amongst the flowering shrubs and plants and our thoughts turned sadly to the delightful arbor at Kebon Sirih. How heavenly it would be to sit there now. If by magic I could only bring that idyllic corner with its arbour here, with you and Mijnheer!

Forgive me, that I am only writing to you now – I could not write earlier – why? – the previous pages will tell you why.

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101 Hélène Mercier, *Verbonden Schakels* (1889), republished 1895, was a collection of her previously published articles. Kartini had transcribed several pages from the book. (See KITLV Archive H1200 (109).)

102 PA De Genestet (1829–1861) was a popular, mid-nineteenth century Dutch poet.

Just then I received your wonderful long letter. Thank you! Thank you! my dearest, my deepest thanks. I will reply to you very soon. Now I can write no more.

Our parents and sisters send both of you their kind regards. And we three thank you with a warm embrace once again for everything and everything.

Goodbye my dearest, my own dear Angel, goodbye! In my thoughts I kiss your hand. With a world full of love for you and Mijnheer, I am what I shall always remain – the one who loves you utterly,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

October 1900

I want to be trained as a teacher – to qualify for the two diplomas: the junior and senior diplomas and take courses in health, first aid and nursing. Much later I will take a language diploma in my own language. When we have finished, then together we will open a boarding school for the daughters of Native officials. I want to gain my training in Holland because Holland will prepare me in all aspects for the task that I wish to take up.[103]

* * * *

How many times in my own life have I not experienced that the fulfilment of one's dearest wish is often accompanied by the severest heartbreaks.

* * * *

And so many, many events in recent times indicate: man proposes, God disposes. They are warnings for us short-sighted human beings, warnings to at all costs avoid being vain, to think that we might have a <u>will of our own</u>.

There is a Power – higher, greater than all human powers put together. Woe betide the person who dares to depend entirely on his own, <u>giant will of steel</u>! There is but one will, which we may and must have: the will to serve Him, the Goodness!

I don't need to tell you, you know it yourself, that we both fervently <u>hope</u> and <u>yearn</u> to see you both again in Semarang or somewhere else. We fervently

[103] This assertive declaration to her former mentor may reflect the encouragement Kartini received as a result of her visit to Batavia but it also followed confirmation that arrangements were being made for her to study in the Netherlands.

hope it and long for it, dearest, but don't count on it. We only hope and pray that God will allow us this happiness! Much must have changed in us that we are speaking like this … Yes much has changed, a great deal!

Oh Moedertje, we can't tell you how happy, how exceedingly happy we are that we have got to know Mevrouw van Kol.[104] She writes: 'The dearest, finest people are but weak, fallible beings' … and we add: 'the human being is mortal. Don't depend on any person!' And why should we not tell you: we have put our trust in human beings … sought strength in others … The history of our last year shows us how we have lost our way. We are so grateful to Nelly, so thankful, that she has shown us the way to true freedom.

No person is free who surrenders himself to another person.

Depending on human beings is to allow yourself to be taken prisoner by mankind.

The way to God and the way to true freedom are one and the same. He who truly serves God is a beholden to no person, is truly free.

Recently we have experienced something quite unpleasant,[105] which, had it occurred before this turnaround in our spiritual lives would definitely have made us despair. But now we hold fast to His hand, we steadfastly maintain our gaze on Him. He will direct us, judge us, love us. And lo, the darkness gave way to light, the storms settled down to a gentle breeze. Everything around us remained the same, in fact, and yet it is no longer the same for us. The change is within us and lights up everything with its light. There is now such stillness and peace within us.

Moedertje we are happy … It is not a wild, jubilant happiness but a calm, peaceful, deep contentedness. We would so love to discuss this with you.

Mr van Kol sent us an extract of a letter from his wife: 'but especially, don't become vain! Because all talents are merely gifts from Allah!'[106] It is the same as Mama has said to us so often. That warning is certainly relevant. We, who from our infancy have been surrounded by constant flattery, certainly have need of it. We, especially us, certainly need to be safeguarded from vanity, the

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104 This is the first reference to her acquaintance with Nellie van Kol but there is no indication how this connection commenced. She refers later to extracts in a letter from her husband who appears to have written to her at the urging of Stella Zeehandelaar. The first surviving letter to Nellie (or Henri van Kol) is not till August of the following year and there also it appears that the addressee is Henri rather than Nellie. The same theme of not depending on people is developed in a letter to EC Abendanon of 24 September 1902. Nellie's own process of religious conversion that she is known to have been experiencing at this time was clearly reflected in Kartini's later correspondence with her.

105 The reference is to the likelihood of a marriage proposal.

106 There is no prior explanation of why Henri van Kol might have written to Kartini.

reef upon which so many ships have unfortunately been wrecked when the soul overreaches itself.

We pray constantly for the power and strength to be able to bear everything, both the suffering and the joy! Joy especially because in joy the temptation is greatest. Many a young life is led astray by the first storms of joy, and many a young life is ruined by it!

What a know-all she is, eh? Make sure that for me you give her a firm tug on the ear when you see me.

How will we react when we see each other again? I already know what your first words to me will be: 'But child, how fat you have become!' And, now, I add in a whisper to you: I have become old, physically – and also spiritual to some extent but that place in my heart on which the golden letters the word love is inscribed, has remained the same – will always be young.

To Mevrouw Abendanon–Mandri

1 November 1900

Great tidings!
My dearest Mevrouw
I can! I can! I can! Wish me luck! – embrace me in your thoughts and read the happiness in my beaming eyes. Dearest, I can study to be a teacher! I can go to the convent. I have spoken to Father! – told him what you had asked me when you were here! And Father thought it excellent, thought it wonderful! I can attend classes again so that I can stand at the front of the class later, when I have obtained my qualifications.

To can and to want! Want and can! A more beautiful combination does not exist! And 'to be able to' makes the trio complete. To want to is to be able to, is it not? Oh, I am so happy, so happy and I know that you both deeply rejoice in my good fortune. Have I exaggerated when I said that you have been sent to me by the beloved God! My dear Angel, our deepest thanks for everything.

Had I not met you at the right time what would have become of me? I am still nothing, that is true, but now I am allowed to be something – wonderful! 'Hope, believe and be courageous.' These – your words – are constantly with me and accompanied me when, just before, I went to father to speak to him. I was very calm, even cheerful – as though I already had a vague feeling that the discussion would conclude successfully for me.

Father found the idea of me being a teacher at a Native girls' school a wonderful idea! How softly and in what a friendly manner he spoke to me!

Oh, so I was not mistaken in him! He does love his child and completely understands her.

I have stood at the cliff's edge and have stared into the dark, bottomless abyss! All this has ended, ended! Love has carried me across! I could embrace the whole world out of pure joy. I have Father's permission and blessing and with this the first and biggest stumbling block on the pathway of life has been cleared away.

After this letter, whose purpose is merely to inform you of the good news as quickly as possible, I will send you a long letter. Yours I received the day before yesterday with great, great gratitude. I shall answer it in detail. It is directly related to what I discussed with Father. You ask two questions to which you wanted a speedy reply. Yes, we want to learn French very, very much. And we do know what Heer J. van Delden[107] came to talk to Mijnheer about. I am nervously excited and not capable of much writing. I hope you can make sense of this disorder.

Goodbye dearest, best friend! Give Mijnheer heartiest greetings from us all and imagine yourself to be closely embraced by your own,

Kartini

Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

2 November 1900

I am going to whisper a heavenly secret to you, dearest, something which I hope and trust will soon be a secret no longer! Oh, I am so happy! Hold me close in your arms, press me to your heart, dearest, kiss me, wish me luck!

It was not a vague mirage, no idle dream that I was chasing after. Listen, Moedertje, I am allowed to make myself free and independent. I am allowed to become something! Since yesterday I feel I am no longer alive, no longer on this earth, but far from home in the heaven of the chosen ones.

I can! I can! I can! I have been repeating this already more than a thousand times and I keep on repeating it. Oh, the whole world is cheering and celebrating along with me. You can imagine it, can't you Moedertje – you, who knows me to the bottom of my heart and knows the storms that only very recently had been raging there? The anxiety and hellish pain I have been undergoing these

[107] Kartini does not clarify what this was. Kartini possibly already knew of J van Delden in his capacity as member of the committee involved in collecting ethnographic exhibits for the Dutch exhibition at the Paris World Exhibition of 1900.

last months; it was a terrible, wretched time that I had to struggle through. Yet it was good – that hard inner struggle has made me strong!

Oh Moedertje, if the requests to Batavia as well as at Mojowarno are both accepted then it will be a difficult struggle for me.[108] My heart is drawn to both: on the one hand, I would be in your neighbourhood, I would be together with my sisters who would certainly come and live with me at Mojowarno when they receive positive information about it, living in a rural setting in a simple place, far from the bustle of the city and the narrow-mindedness of public debate, in the midst of simple hearts, pure souls living in an atmosphere of beautiful, holy, service-oriented Love. And the other …?

'Nothing that has been gained too easily, too simply, can have any long-lasting value and respect for us!' says Mevrouw Abendanon.

But let me not worry too much yet about making a choice – take it slowly, we will get there eventually, haste is usually destructive. I will listen very carefully to the little voice inside me and what it tells me and in consultation with my head, will do what it advises. Isn't that a good plan, Moedertje?

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 December 1900

My dear kind angel,
Forgive me, oh forgive my long, unfriendly silence; I feel it, you must have been disappointed in me. This thought gives me indescribable pain. God knows how I longed, have pleaded for you, night and day; how I suffered under this enforced silence. My heart, my whole being was drawn to you and I had to remain mute.

Father determined this was best for the time being and I had to accept it. Can you forgive me, my dear? Yes, yes, I know, I am utterly convinced that no one can be more pleased for me and with me about my Father's permission for me to choose my own destiny than you two. Could you be any other than the first to whom I send these good tidings? Heartfelt thanks, dearest, for the hearty good wishes from you both about this. After that wonderful first of November so much has happened. Oh dearest – how I have longed for you! I was ecstatically happy when the sisters received your letter last week and

[108] This seems to confirm earlier suggestions that Marie Ovink had made efforts to have Kartini accepted at the Mojowarno mission hospital for training. No Javanese women at the time were admitted into the STOVIA in Batavia.

passed on to me your best wishes. 'A sign from her!' I exclaimed. With tears in my eyes I read the beloved handwriting and buried my face between the sheets of handwritten paper, kissing them again and again. Dearest, I know for whom the motto printed at the top of your letter was especially meant and I am happy and proud that I can look you straight in the eye. I have not let myself be defeated.

Either victory or death – a middle way? No! And now, now the approval is unconditional – I can follow the calling of my heart. I can find my own field of work and make my life useful to others. And not only for me, but I have gained this approval also for my two dear, loyal sisters. We are determined to be victorious – with or without Father's approval; to follow the path that we have chosen. How hearts would break if we had to do the latter because we love Father so very, very much – and yet we would not avoid it – we cannot do otherwise; we will achieve this and we must, and we shall have it, whatever the cost.

That is why we are so extremely happy that Father has concurred with our ideas without regret; if today or tomorrow we leave our beloved home then we will go with the blessings of the one we love most in the world. I wholeheartedly underwrite Wertheim's words: 'wonderful is the opposition, because it stimulates the resolve; marvellous the negation, because it calls into being the proof; excellent is the denial because it turns self-awareness into self-conscious expression.'[109] If I had not had so much opposition, had not experienced so much rejection or had not known so much suffering in my as yet brief life, then I would not have become what I am now: a little more than the ordinary person!!

I sense from so many things that you love me – it is such a wonderful feeling, which makes me so rich and so infinitely happy – and at the same time I feel your serious intentions, your great desire to support me on my not very easy path of life. I am infinitely grateful to you for this, dearest! That great friendship entitles you to my complete confidence and I gladly give it to you because I also love you, oh, so very much. Nothing, not a single hiding place in my heart will remain unknown to you. I am going to open my whole heart to you – turn open the pages of my life's history which, before you, no one has seen and which after you, most likely, no one will see again.

It is not easy for me to reveal some smarting wounds. If I had committed murder or some other terrible crime, its confession would be easier for me, but oh, to reveal the painful wounds of the heart which we have received from

[109] Jacob Leon Wertheim was a significant late nineteenth century Dutch poet and writer.

those … from whom we had sought help! Forgive them, my dearest, in my own heart there exists no revenge – not a single bitter thought against them – and give me thus the strength to write the following pages which will explain to you – to let you understand completely – why I passionately long to be able, by some means or other, to bring about change in the Native world which is such a bitterly sad place for women. I have come to know this bitterness at very close quarters, have deeply shared the experience and the suffering.[110]

I have two mothers … I have never told anyone this – not even Mevr. Ovink, my trusted, motherly friend.[111] Mevrouw, I have known hell from personal experience – I have lived there. A whole world of deep suffering lies buried in the years that are behind me. From my youngest years suffering was my close companion. I have seen suffering and have suffered myself because of the suffering of my mother and … because I am her child. Oh, the heartache of that suffering in hell. There were days, so pitiless and sad that with my whole being I prayed for an end to my earthly existence and I would have ended it myself – if I had not so utterly loved … my Father.

Mama cannot be blamed for the fact that there was a time that she did not love me and I never held a grudge against her for this – even when I realized, although naturally not so clearly as now, that what was asked of her was superhuman – to raise her stepchildren together with her own brood while day in, day out she had to accept the presence of their mother at her side even though she was for her nothing more than a servant. Poor, poor Moeder, poor Mama![112] My mother knew when she followed Father that she would one day get a mistress; Father had not tried to pretend to her that she would remain his only wife and when Mama married, she knew that Moeder was already there – and her children, those who were born and those who might still come. Rank, honour, respect, being married – here you see the alpha and omega of Native women. They did not know and they still do not know any better … they knew and they know, nothing.

Mama fulfilled her difficult task in a totally praiseworthy manner – she had herself been a stepchild such as this and knew the suffering of a child of

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110 The following account expands on the earlier description of her childhood, revealing more intimate aspects of it that motivated her decision to oppose traditional practice and attitudes.

111 The fact that Kartini had hidden the true nature of her family from her 'lieve moedertje' (Marie Ovink-Soer) in the course of a relationship that stretched over almost one decade and had included extensive discussions on Dutch feminist discourse is remarkable. It perhaps indicates the extent to which Kartini attempted to present a particular 'European' image of herself – and the greater self-confidence with which she entered her relationship with Rosa Abendanon.

112 The distinction is between Ibu Ngasirah, 'Moeder' and Raden Ayu Moerjam, 'Mama'.

a heartless stepmother.[113] She was an angel for my brothers and sisters – the brothers and sisters of her children, her three daughters – and some of them became totally her children, as dear to her as her own. That for a long time her heart was closed to me was due to me … it was human nature. I … was more loved? than my older sister, her eldest. This Mama could not forgive me, nor forget. But although Ma did not love me, I was always fond of her – she was so kind, so good to my brothers and sisters and I shall never be able to forget how carefully Mama nursed and cared for us when we were ill, we, the children of her, whom she hated more than anyone else in the world and whom she had to tolerate being by her side every day.

In each person there exists the angel and the beast. Oh, beware when the angel sleeps and the beast realizes it is unchained. My dream was once to win Mama's love, especially for Moeder's sake – I was the greatest thorn in Mama's side. Could that dream have been realized? I still would not dare either to confirm or deny that possibility – I only know that it was not easy. Let me pass over that sad period, when my best intentions were misunderstood – or else interpreted to my disadvantage – when I experienced nothing but hatred where I offered love. My own mother turned against me as a result of misunderstanding – she, especially she, for whose sake I humiliated myself, crawled on the ground, for a little affection – put up with everything, everything. Oh, it was hard!

And only Father's great love kept me going, prevented me from doing myself in! My eldest sister married and from then on Mama's heart began to soften towards me; Ma became friendlier and friendlier towards me and now Ma is a good friend to me and I am her confidante and now I can say truthfully that I love Mama very much. With the marriage of my sister the sun of good fortune began to shine and shone increasingly more brightly in my heaven.

The years that now followed were the happiest I have ever had. And that sunny period washed away the sad childhood years from my memory. I came to know my younger sisters and the three of us found each other – never to lose each other again. We came to know both the Ovink ladies and this acquaintance brought with it a complete turnabout in our lives.[114] The doors of the kabupaten which had been resolutely shut in our faces, opened at the approach of our dear friends – and the little birds which had been for so long imprisoned, came with their assistance out into the open air. Mama resisted our liberal yearnings with tooth and nail – but we were warmly supported

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113 RA Moerjam was the daughter of her father's secondary wife, who was the daughter of a Jepara village chief.

114 Marie Ovink-Soer's sister was Elsie Soer (1854–1948) who was also a published writer.

by Father – Father, who so much wanted to see his daughters with happy faces. We never asked for anything but Father knew what we wanted without asking. There was only one powerful wish he could not fulfil – one dream he could not make reality and that was just the one that was dearest to us, the one we most wanted: our dream of freedom. He wanted to – but he had not the means to.

A new and different spirit has entered our family circle – and the example of the bond between us three incited imitation. Our goal was freedom – equality. Away with the stupid etiquette, it suffocated one of the most beautiful human qualities – naturalness. We want to love in a natural way, not formally. We really cannot help it that one is born earlier or later than the other. Beginning with me all that nonsense about age difference will cease. The rights of primogeniture have only this advantage remaining: removing hot irons from the fire for the younger ones. There exists among us a harmony of conduct and principle – and among us three in particular, our sworn band. With each day we feel more and more that we are bound together by a deep, holy bond that may not be broken. Our relationship with Ma is also most cordial – although 'caution' is still the watchword. A careless word, deed, could awaken the old hatred. As a remnant from the old days I am still made to redo everything that is not right. Still, that does not worry me now. And Mama cannot vigorously attack me for my liberal ideals because her little daughter Roekmini is as mad as I am and agrees on everything with the black sheep. And I also now know that Mama is not so opposed to what I say and do even if she gives the opposite impression. Why, otherwise, would Mama often remark, totally without malice, of Kartinah – her youngest and favourite – that she has many things in common with the nuisance.[115] And so, everything is being patched up – only because I am me.

And our lives became more and more beautiful – but a black spot became visible on the horizon of my life, and spread out alarmingly. Heavy, dark clouds gathered above my head. Eternal law of nature: after rain – sunshine, after sunshine – rain; after night comes the morning, after the day, the night! And then noble souls crossed the path of our lives – my dear, kind Angel appeared! My heavily clouded life once more shone with a friendly, soft light, the star of Hope.

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115 This is a rare example of an unembroidered and frank assessment of her circumstances. It also suggests why it was that Kardinah was selected to be married before her two older sisters. Roekmini's correspondence reveals a commitment and determination to 'the cause' equal to that of Kartini.

Now I open another page of the book of my life – one written in life's blood. You know we have a brother in Holland,[116] and you know what he is for and to me – my best, most loyal friend, my adviser and my guide. He has been in Holland now for four years and – he still has not achieved anything. No one had expected this – here he had been so careful, had done his very best, studied easily and, more importantly, he was thoroughly good and noble hearted. This is of course the declaration of a sister, but that sister dares to assert that strangers who had known him earlier will confirm it. His former teachers only gave the best testimonials as to his intellect, and what he is personally, I can now say, is evidenced by the high regard in which he is remembered everywhere over here.

He arrived in Holland to a totally different environment – certainly not an unpleasant one – he was perceived as a fabulously wealthy Indies prince. He was widely honoured, celebrated and received and my young inexperienced brother fell for it. In those four years he did not study – just had a good time … and lived it up. The guardians in Holland advised Father to let him come home. Just before our departure to Batavia, Father gave me a desperate letter of his to read which was full of feelings of hopelessness, guilt, regret, self-accusation. He confessed his sins and begged not to have to return. He wanted to go to England to find work there. On the train on the way to Batavia I heard that he would return before the end of the year – the travel money had already been sent to him[117] I pressed my hand against my heart – it hurt so terribly much, as though it were being squeezed. I sat mute and immobile, staring straight out in front of me, seeing nothing – countless thoughts in my head and my heart full to overflowing. My poor darling – that it should come to this.

It was at that moment that I realized how much I loved him. No! No, you must not come back to the Indies – it is just the same as when you left. You will not be able to carry the burden of shame and it will break father's heart. You must stay in Europe, you must be given one more chance – to make up for what you have ruined. And you can do it – you must do it – you owe it to your family in the first place and after that to your countrymen. The Javanese are too often looked down upon and often unjustly and now it should be justified and because of you – you, one of the best? My boy, my proud noble boy, must your young beautiful life end like this? Your life, that promised to be so good? Must you belong to the pitiable failures, the pitiable social shipwrecks? No – no, that

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116 Sosrokartono arrived in the Netherlands in 1897. After a difficult university career – the beginnings of which are reported on here – he remained in Europe till 1925, working for a long time as Europe-based journalist for several, including American, newspapers.

117 This is confirmed in Hilda de Booij's letter quoted in the introduction.

cannot be, that must not be. I cannot, I will not believe it, nor will I believe that you have become bad.

I continued thinking, looking for a solution for the survival of my poor darling. Suddenly I thought of something: the marriage plans! And I felt something akin to a bitter joy – the means to a rescue had been found. Mama was very keen on that marriage. Everything I asked for had been granted to me – the trip to Batavia was in order to make me submissive. Well, I would marry and do everything they wanted – on condition that my brother would be allowed to stay in Holland for another year – if that year was successful, then until he was finished. My life for his life. I thought about our childhood years – the sad times came to mind but alongside all that bitterness, his image, like a great blessing, flooded my memory. That image was woven into all the loving and friendly memories I had from that time. My dear, faithful friend! Yes faithful – he was faithful to me. Loyally he stood by me in that difficult time – loyally he helped me with and through everything, everything. It was due to him that my spirit did not die from starvation – that my intellect was not totally blunted. He was the first, dearest friend I had. Before I knew anyone else, I knew him and loved him. And now he was in need. He must and would be helped. And the only means to rescue him that I knew of was the marriage. And what this meant to me …! Oh God! – the destruction of everything that was dear and holy to me – dreams, ideals, pride, feelings of self-worth, female pride –everything! But he would be saved, the love of my heart. His downfall would mean my moral destruction and my moral downfall could perhaps save him – choose! And I chose … my heart was in tatters.

I arrived in Batavia in this frame of mind. Do you understand now my dear, why I was so quiet then? How could I be merry? Death was in my heart. And my young sisters were also quiet – they too loved him so dearly. There were nights at your house when I did not sleep – I constantly saw him before my eyes – his features twisted with sorrow, the once proud, noble head bent under the weight of grieving, regret and shame. And then next to that, the image of my Father, broken, destroyed. There were nights when I cried myself to sleep. Oh God! That evil I wanted to dedicate my life to combat – I now had to reach out to. I would trespass on the holiest principles of my sisters whose rights I had wanted to fight for. I would cause 'her' that suffering experienced by my Mother, that hellish suffering that I knew and had suffered. I would take over the rightful place of a woman – a Mother. It is sinful, it cannot be denied, to follow a man for whom one feels nothing but loathing. Oh! Oh! – But it was all for him – for him – my beloved brother. Better that my life was destroyed than his because with his downfall the life of my beloved Father would have been destroyed.

When you told me about Nellie I suffered doubly, for you and with you.[118] I had to disappoint you. I felt how much this would concern you because you loved me – I knew that, even though you had not told me. I felt it in a thousand things. Do you remember how I asked and pleaded with you: do not be so fond of me, I will disappoint you! And you answered so quietly and confidently: 'You won't, I know better!' I was desperate and wanted to shout it out – but Mama was sitting nearby.

I contained myself until the last Concordia evening – and then I could do so no longer and you saw me weak, wretched and – oh, so devastated.

We came home – a day or so later uncle arrived. I should never have endured him – who is hated for a thousand reasons, and in recent times more so than ever.[119] When I saw him, all the hatred, all the aversion that I felt for the marriage with his son welled up in me with even greater strength. And a day later there arrived a totally desperate letter from Kartono – bitter self-accusation, regret, grief – everything mixed together. He blamed himself, pleaded for forgiveness for all the suffering he had caused us, begged us to forgive him, appealed to our love for him, begged us to comfort our parents and to remain their joy and happiness.

What I had to live through in that week after our arrival home was terrible. I thought I would lose my reason – would go mad. That this did not happen I had only my strong constitution to thank. Father suffered noticeably and became ill.

I wrote to Moeder Ovink to cheer me up and while I was still writing the letter, I received one from her informing me of the death of her mother-in-law, to whom they were both very much attached. Instead of seeking comfort I had to offer comfort and that did me some good.

Nine terrible days passed by. On the morning of the tenth day Father called me to him. 'A new catastrophe?' my heart asked anxiously. 'Father?' I cried.

'Everything is all right again – Mas To is staying in Holland, a friend of mine is confident and has promised me to prepare him.'

So overwhelming was the feeling of joy that came over me that I closed my eyes as one overcome – blinded as it were by the brightness of the daylight in which I suddenly found myself after having groped round for so long in utter darkness. I could not think, only feel that overwhelming good fortune.

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118 This may refer to Nellie van Kol but the issue is unclear.

119 The reference is to Raden Mas Adipati Ario Hadiningrat, Regent of Demak. The following sentence appears to imply that a marriage with her cousin had been suggested, which is confirmed below.

'Father!' I cried again and in that one word was contained all the happiness and joy which thrilled my soul. Father wrapped his arms around me and patted me on the shoulder. We saw in each other's beaming faces – oh, we were both so happy – that we both loved that dear boy very much.

Father gave me a letter and a postcard from our friend, and, drunk with happiness, I rushed to our room where I fell to my knees in front of our bed and buried my face in the pillows. I cried and sobbed as … as I had that night with you – but now it was in grateful happiness. The letter from Father's friend contained information about my brother. He advised Father against bringing my brother back: in the first place he could not, in the current situation, come to the Indies[120] and then it would be a pity and a shame to cut off his avenue for further development. He was confident to be able to set him on the right track again because he was not innately bad (wonderful), he was still young – was intelligent. In short he was confident that my brother would still get there. He had become enslaved neither to drink, nor women, nor gambling. What had affected him? The honouring, the celebrating and the reception he had received had overwhelmed him – had ambushed his vision. Oh! How grateful and relieved I was after reading the letter. The postcard was dated later and contained nothing more than: 'All in order – letter with good news follows.' This had been the signal agreed to in the letter that everything had been successfully organized. Our brother had been saved! I understood how Father had suffered in the period between letter and postcard. That tortuous waiting had thrown him on the sickbed.

And suddenly a light flashed: I realized how Father could almost have done that to me!

It was in this period of hopelessness and fear that the request had arrived.[121] Ma was very keen on it and, after all, I had never told Father that I refused to marry. Oh! That much indulged etiquette.

The following day we received the triumphal letter of good fortune from Kartono – we wrote back immediately. When last week the sisters received your letter I said happily: 'All we need now is a letter from Holland and our happiness will be complete!' And, lo and behold, Soematri brings not one but two letters from Holland for Father – one from Kartono and one from his teacher, both containing good news. Kartono's letter was overflowing with gratitude and happiness – this was in reply to our letter. And we, we are happy and grateful that with our love we are able to make someone happy and provide

120 Travel was disrupted due to the Boer War.

121 The 'request' refers to the marriage proposal implied on the previous page.

support. So we are not completely useless in the world – there is someone who needs us.

1 November – a day that will stay with me for the rest of my life and for the good news it brought me I have you to thank, my dearest Angel. The previous day I had received your letter of 27 October and this caused me to decide, gave me the courage to bring everything to a head. On the morning of 1 November I read 'Character Formation in Women' by H Mercier.[122] This had also given me courage and a very nice letter from an acquaintance[123] I received in the afternoon put me in such a merry frame of mind that I was dancing with joy. And I went to Father with a light and joyful heart, as bright as if I was going to a party and not to a pronouncement upon my future.

'Father, if the Native School for Girls which Mijnheer Abendanon is planning is established, can I be a teacher there? Mevrouw Abendanon has asked me.'

'That would be very good – excellent. Yes, you may.'

'But I would need first of all to be trained, Father, I would have to study and do exams. I would have to go to the Convent or somewhere else.'

'Yes, naturally.'

Not a single, bitter hard or sharp word was uttered, although I did get a severe talking to. But that I deserved, I admit it, but Father did it so quietly, in such a kind way, that tears came to my eyes. Oh, so I had not been mistaken about my Father's boundless love for me, his complete understanding of his child. What I had always suspected had now become certainty: Father would suffer even more than me if he had to impose that great suffering on me, that he had hoped as fervently as I that there would be a solution – because he knew that I could really not be happy in the kind of marriage which until now has been traditional amongst us.

You can imagine how extremely happy I was. I asked if I could immediately tell you the glad news and I could.

The following day I wrote Mevr. Ovink a long letter in which I confessed everything – before then I had not told her anything of our plans because I had thought that I would visit her shortly and I preferred to talk things over with our good friends in person.[124] The letter that she wrote in reply to my confession I am sending with this. It expands on mine. (The idea of becoming a lady-in-waiting came from Mr J. van Delden – we have totally rejected that.) My dear sisters were totally enthralled at my good fortune – they have been and

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122 This was a reference to an article included in *Verbonden Schakels* (1889/1895).

123 The 'acquaintance' maybe Stella, although Kartini wrote to a wider circle of friends.

124 See Kartini's letter to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer of 2 November.

are in their love and loyalty a wonderful support. And for them a way has now also been found – they also yearn as earnestly as their older sister to achieve an independent existence. Roekmini and Kleintje want to become midwives.

You should now first read Mevr. O.'s letter before reading on. The sisters immediately glowed at the suggestion of Moedertje O. and Doctor Bervoets,[125] but I feared that it would meet with fierce opposition from Father. I thought that Father dear would consider that being a midwife was beneath our dignity – not a job for girls of our standing, that he would not like it that we would be mixing with village girls – to live and work and, later as midwives, to be employed in the village. But how mistaken I was in my expectation, wonderful!

Several days after having received Mevr. O.'s letter, I went with bated breath to Father to tell him of the proposal suggested by our friends and which the sisters were keen to take up. And I could not believe it when I had finished speaking that my old ears had heard no refusal, no opposition. Father knew that Dr Bervoets had a very good name and the Ovink family he regards as a very good guarantor – he entrusts his children to these friends with total confidence. The only thing that Father insisted on was that we would maintain for the time being a total silence about these plans. We have to take account of the public which is constantly watching us – because we … are the first. We must try if at all possible to avoid a fiasco. I had to ask Mevr. Ovink for the most detailed information on everything and to investigate everything while maintaining a strict secrecy, even towards Dr Bervoets – from whom she obtained the information but who was not given our names.

I am sending you with this a copy of the letters from Dr Bervoets sent to us by Mevr. O. The sisters are in seventh heaven and are already dreaming about Mojowarno, of the idealistic Dr B., of the hospital – of the blue dresses and white aprons (won't they look odd in them!). What do you think about all this, dearest?

Mej[uffrouw] van Loon[126] wrote me a kind and friendly letter – if you meet her would you give her my warmest regards and say that I am very grateful to her for her letter, am sorry that I have not yet been able to answer it. If it were only up to me I would have replied long ago. In the meantime I was wasting

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125 Dr H Bervoets (1864–1933) directed the hospital at the Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap (NZG) mission) in Mojowarno, East Java from 1894–1904. He introduced the training of Javanese nurses and emphasized the missionary significance of medical work. Well connected to Dutch nobility, he was an influential voice in colonial politics and mission circles.

126 No further detail could be discovered about this lady.

away (this is no exaggeration, ask the sisters how often lately the otherwise thoroughly healthy old goat has been just lying around) – because she is longing for so much … and for you in the first place. What must you have thought of me, hearing nothing from me. I really felt your disappointment, and that grieved me. That I was thinking about you should be evident from the small painting accompanying this that was meant to be a Sinterklas present, but, because the frame was not ready in time, has been transformed into a Christmas present.

Now, what have I not yet mentioned? In your letter there was one question which I could not yet reply to and which I unfortunately still cannot: 'When are you coming?'

In my extreme joy and happiness about Father's approval to allow me to arrange for an independent existence – I forgot all the practical arrangements.

Father does not have the means and he has a great many expenses. For 4 years my dear Father thought that this year he would be relieved of one great commitment: the education of Kartono. That was not to be. This burden has only become heavier. Mama in particular is very embittered about it. In a couple of years our youngest brother will have to go to Semarang[127] and now I am going to add to this. It troubles me greatly to have to add to Father's already considerable difficulties. And then there is Moeder – I would like to spare her any accusation that her children cost so much.[128] That I do not wish to marry is already bad enough in Mama's opinion and that, on top of this, I am going to be costing more than all the other girls will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. (At the moment Mama knows nothing of our plans – only when everything is all arranged will we go to Mama to ask her blessing.) I did not think of any of this when I wrote that happy letter.

I read in one of the issues of *Het Onderwijs*[129] which you sent me that, at the time, the Government was sending several Native youths to the Netherlands to train as teachers at Government expense. And I thought: 'Could I not benefit from such an opportunity?' When the sisters received your letter and I read between the lines of your desire to have some news of me I could no longer resist the dictates of my heart to write to you. I went to Father and presented him with this idea that I had been toying with for a long time.

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127 Sosro Moelijono (b. 1885) later attended the Semarang Hogere Burger School (HBS) like his older brothers.

128 This is a further reference to the friction within the polygamous relationship: Kartono, Kartini, Moelijono are all children of Ibu Ngasirah, who Kartini earlier describes as merely 'a servant' in the kabupaten (Kartini to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri December 1900).

129 This was a Dutch education journal.

And now I am writing to you dearest, and I am going to ask you a great favour: could you ask your husband if His Excellency could not arrange for me to be trained as a teacher for the proposed School for Native Girls at Government expense?[130] How grateful I would be to you I will not have to tell you. My education was extremely basic, I have only completed second grade of the elementary school. What I may have learned at school I have completely forgotten. I would have to begin all over again. When I was young I was able to learn fairly readily – I was not backward but between then and now lies such a long period of time.

If the Government should not grant this request then I will have to forget about the teacher training course. It will then not be the first time that a golden dream had vanished into thin air.

Father would also very much like to see me become a teacher and will allow me to be trained for this position but of course I know what this will mean to him. No, I cannot accept this, I will not be egotistical. Father has already made me so glad, so happy and so grateful with that immense gift – my freedom. And to me this is the most precious gift that could be granted. I would have stolen it had it not been given to me.

Do not think badly of me, my dear, if I should give up the idea of becoming a teacher. You will be very disappointed I know but I have to and I myself will feel terrible about it because the idea of being allowed to help transform little people into adults has become very dear to me. But I do not want to be an egotist.

What will I then do if I should not become a teacher? I will go with my sisters to Mojowarno – there is also a wide field of labour there and good work to be done. But can I still be your friend if I do not become a teacher? Still retain a small place in your heart? Your love means so much to me – it will be a wonderful support to me in my self-chosen, difficult, thorny path of life.

My Moeder is very grateful to you for your friendship with her child. She knows about our plans and approves of them. She approves of anything as long as we are happy. Our happiness is what she asks for, she does not care about anything else. The only thing she is not looking forward to is the forthcoming separation.

With this I am sending you our priceless treasure: a letter from our brother. Read it, dearest, and tell me: does this sound like a lost soul? We cannot do

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130 This suggests that, although the idea of being appointed to a girls' school appears to have been first mooted by the Abendanons, Kartini had independently developed the idea of becoming a teacher.

without this letter from our young brother for too long; I am sending it to you so you will come to know him like we know him. My brother is proud by nature and by inclination. This pride we much admire in him, although it has often been the cause of much grief. And now we have received this letter in which he who is so proud belittles himself before his sisters. We love him even more for this.

How much I love you and trust you is apparent in this letter in which I entrust to you everything, everything. You are the only one with whom I have ever discussed my mother or our brother in this way.

I feel so relieved, now that I have written all this down for you. You will always remain my friend, won't you, dearest? Do not speak to anyone about my sisters' plans. Mojowarno now has a double significance for us, now that we know from a letter from Dr Bervoets that the training for midwives will not cost anything. It is wonderful for us to know that this will make our parents' burden so much lighter. Three daughters taken care of – that is a great relief; makes things easier – although not for the heart. We know that our dear parents can only just bear the thought of doing without their daughters if they must. How empty the house will be when we are no longer there and how strange we will find it to no longer see those dear, beloved faces of our loved ones about us. But let us not think of the forthcoming separation – at the moment we want to thoroughly enjoy our being at home, our being together. To our dying day we will be grateful to our beloved Father, will bless him for the education he has given us which, while causing us much grief, has also brought so much happiness. And now Father has given the crowning glory to his good works: he has given us our freedom. We are so grateful and happy.

It is wonderful to live in this day and age; we can only be grateful for this privilege. The coming new century holds great promise. In 1901 the bomb will explode. Poor, dear, good Mama – she is still dreaming of us as glittering Raden Ayus. When I see her like that and think of what lies ahead, then a great pity for her wells up in me. How she will grieve about her 'crazy' daughters.[131] I hope fervently that we will be able to leave as good friends. Only then will our happiness be complete. But nothing is complete on this earth.

Dr Anton and his wife have stayed with us from the 10th to the 12th and brought regards from both of you. Thank you dear. When we heard of their imminent arrival I immediately thought: 'Undoubtedly Mevr. A. will know

[131] Kartini here seems certain that the plans for further education for the three eligible daughters would succeed.

more about this.' And I was not mistaken. It was a great pleasure to make the acquaintance of the Anton family.[132]

Last month sister Roekmini received a pleasant letter from Dr Adriani together with a few of his articles. Dr A. wrote that since his return to Mapane[133] he has not heard or spoken a word of Dutch and that would be the case until his wife returned from Holland. Wonderful to meet such noble people as Dr A. We will continue to remain in correspondence with this fine person – that will be very good for us and we learn much.

How are you both? When I received your 'cry for help' about your busy life in Batavia and your yearning for nature I thought – if only I could whisk you both here by magic, how you would enjoy living in the country. The countryside, especially at Klein Scheveningen, is now more beautiful than ever. Come on, why not make a quick trip? Freshen up, breathe in the healthy air of our little blessed little Scheveningen.

Father gave me the 2 circulars written by your husband about midwives and the Native School for Girls.[134] My heart beats uncontrollably when I read the latter circular – a large tear rolled down my cheek. It was dedicated to the noble friend of the people. Oh, if all the people who hold positions of high office – if all officials perceived their task in the same way as your highly regarded and revered husband – how much less suffering there would be in the world and how many more happy people there would be.[135]

How are your two boys in Holland? And where is Didi at the moment?[136] Is he almost in Java? We are so looking forward to making his acquaintance.

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132 This begins Kartini's correspondence with Professor Anton, a German professor who was in Java to study Dutch colonial policy. Anton was one of the many important visitors to Jepara to meet Kartini on the recommendation of Jacques Abendanon.

133 Kartini first met the linguist, Dr Nicolaus Adriani at the home of the Abendanons in 1900 (see Introduction). Mapane was a main port in the Gulf of Tomini and centre of colonial administration of Central Sulawesi where Adriani was recording the Pamona language. In 1900 he had published 'Mededelingen omtrent de Torajdas van Midden Celebes' (Information Regarding the Toraja of Central Celebes) in the journal of the Bataviaasch Genootschap, the scientific society of which he and Abendanon were members.

134 These were internal government circulars, not published articles. The response of regional colonial administrators and Javanese officials to these pioneering recommendations was largely negative. Kartini had contemplated both possibilities before receiving the circulars..

135 Jacques Abendanon had been appointed as director of native (not European) education in 1900 before the introduction of the 'Ethical Policy'. His reforms were largely resisted by the colonial bureaucracy and he resigned in 1905.

136 Abendanon's son, EC (Edie) Abendanon had just completed his studies in the Netherlands as an engineer-geologist and was soon to take up a position at the Ombilin coal mines in West Sumatra.

This newspaper cutting had been sent to me by an English lady (Johanna v. Woude) – she thought I could read German – to encourage me in my plans, she said. I had already read the same thing in Dutch some time ago. What a blessed little man, that Casem Amin Bey.[137] If I could write in Arabic I would send him my appreciation and high regard. And I just read that in Constantinople a university for women was established a year ago where American women lectured in the English language – gave papers – with only little modification for Eastern morals and traditions,[138] but apart from that totally American in form and content. How wonderful! Such news makes you feel you are alive, it fans the spirit and increases one's zest for life.

Yes, we paint and read a lot – also gardening, cooking and sewing – and recently I have been reading Bertha von Suttner's *De Wapens Neergelegd*,[139] a beautiful and mighty book, don't you think ? I am still under its influence. We read Mej[uffrouw] de Wit's *Orpheus in de Desa*.[140] We think it's a jewel.

With this I am also sending the four small boxes you ordered – the costs are: cutlery box *f*2, photograph box *f*2:50 and filing box *f*0:70. I hope that the boxes will arrive in good condition and that you will be happy with them.

I would like to continue writing but the fingers refuse – they are weak from holding the pen and you are no doubt dead tired from reading it so therefore I will quickly put a full stop to it, but just add this – please return the letters from my brother and Mevr. Ovink. And now, goodbye my dear angel – my 'Kalong!' – our respectful and hearty greetings to your husband and consider yourself warmly hugged and kissed by your threesome and particularly the eldest.

Your own – the one who loves you so much,
Kartini

It is now two o'clock at night. Goodnight! I will dream of you, my dearest.

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137 Casem (Qasim) Amin Bey (1863–1908) an Egyptian writer, modernizer and nationalist. wrote *The Emancipation of the Egyptian Woman* (1900).

138 The reference seems to be to the Women's College (1871–1924). The British Quaker, Ann Mary Burgess founded an extensive mission program among women and the poor in Constantinople which attracted world wide support.

139 Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914), *Die Waffen Nieder* (They Lay Down Their Arms). Dutch translation 1900. Von Suttner was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905.

140 Augusta de Wit's *Orpheus in the Desa*, published as a book in 1903, was previously serialized in newspapers.

LETTERS 1901

Introduction

On 17 September 1901, in opening the new session of the Dutch parliament, the Dutch monarch, Queen Wilhelmina, made the now famous declaration that her Christian Anti-Revolutionaire Partij-led government would from now on take especial interest in the welfare of the native people. The declaration was specifically directed at the situation in Java, and related both to the condition of indigenous Javanese and what had been referred to as the 'pauper' population of mainly Eurasian people who constituted a sizable proportion of the legally defined European population of the mayor urban centres. Eventually, in the year of Kartini's death, a decade-long enquiry was instituted into the 'causes of the decline in native welfare'. Three years later a program of subsidized three-year elementary schools was introduced and very gradually in the course of the decade new policies to support indigenous agriculture, an extension of public health facilities, sanitation and rehousing in urban areas, and a more decentralized system of administration to address local issues were introduced.

Although launched in 1901, therefore, the reforms were to take another decade for their impact to become apparent. As far as Kartini was concerned, however, there were signs of increasing interest in and concern about the plight of colonial subjects amongst a small circle of individuals. Behind the scenes Abendanon's plans to open a school for Javanese girls to which Kartini was to be appointed, were rejected outright by his superiors in the colonial administration, as were his efforts to extend the provision of Dutch language education for Javanese men. Nevertheless, at an informal and personal level, interest in Kartini and her aims continued to grow. Kartini's relationship with Rosa Manuela Abendanon-Mandri blossomed: she writes to (and receives letters from) her new friend on an almost fortnightly basis. The new relationship clearly occupied much of Kartini's time and the lengthy letters she wrote provided an opportunity for her to air her more personal thoughts and fears. Correspondence with Stella in the Netherlands had, by contrast, slowed and proceeded at roughly three monthly intervals.

A new correspondent also appears on the scene in 1901: Hilda de Booij-née Boissevain. As noted in the introduction, after having met Kartini, Hilda had written to her mother enthusiastically about her Javanese visitors. In turn, Kartini and her sisters had been particularly fascinated by Hilda's

child, Tommy, and in the year that followed congratulated her on her second child. The 1900 visit to Batavia was also important in introducing Kartini to another significant correspondent, Dr Nicolaus Adriani, as well as a number of European ladies to whom references are made but no correspondence exists. Later, Professor Gustav K Anton, who had also been introduced to her by Jacques Abendanon, became another significant correspondent during the year. The acquaintance and 'imprimatur' of Abendanon, the key representative of the colonial administration in the Kartini story, was therefore pivotal. As his successor in the department of education, G Hazeu, emphasized in his tribute in 1926, despite the difficult relationship Abendanon experienced with the central colonial government, his distinguished role in colonial scientific and legal circles ensured he was an influential figure in the colony, particularly amongst advocates of policy reform (Hazeu 1926).

Nicolaus Adriani, the missionary linguist and regular visitor to Batavia, shared with Abendanon the ideal of wanting to contribute to 'the advancement of native society'. Adriani represented a Christian (mission) perspective on this question, replicated in Kartini's circle of acquaintances by Dr Bervoets, missionary doctor at the influential Mojowarno East Java mission centre who later attended Kartini's wedding. Even though Adriani had been confused about Kartini's name in his report of their initial meeting (see Introduction), each had clearly left an impression on the other. Adriani proves to be an important correspondent (also retrospectively for the reader) in that he elicits from Kartini an expression of her awareness of a completely different part of the archipelago inhabited by a 'primitive society' but where she also learned, there were other 'brown people' who aspired to education and progress.

In contrast to Abendanon's liberal and Adriani's Christian perspectives (and the socialist perspective of Henri van Kol whom she meets later), Kartini's other new correspondent in this year, Professor Anton, had a more academic interest in the 'condition of the native'. As an expert on European colonial policies, he was interested in studying Dutch colonial practice *in situ*. Like Adriani, he was one of a number of contemporary scholars who saw in Kartini a touchstone to their thinking about indigenous cultures and society, and who, for Kartini, provided a further opportunity to 'educate' influential Europeans about Java. The correspondence Kartini undertakes with these different figures makes clear that she was quite capable of distinguishing between the various political and ideological orientations exemplified amongst her growing circle of contacts.

Foremost in the correspondence during this year is, of course, the developing relationship with Rosa. Although they had only spent a brief amount of time in each other's company, over the course of the year Kartini further

unburdened herself to her sympathetic friend. Rosa provided Kartini with a more passionate correspondence and a better appreciation of Dutch feminism and social reform than Stella. Equally important, Rosa provided her with a direct conduit to the colonial machinery upon which the realization of her quest ultimately depended. It was Rosa who, it appears, suggested to Kartini to reconsider her plans for Europe which Kartini promised to 'think carefully' about. (See letter of 21 December 1901).

The letter addressed to Mevrouw van Kol of August 1901 appears curiously out of place in its forthright statement of her aims. The content is notable for the way it prefigures, in brief, her 1903 memorandum in defining the 'political' significance of educating Javanese women and the political role that she herself might play:

> Our efforts have a dual aim; to labour for the uplifting of our people and to prepare the road for our sisters that will lead to a better, more dignified situation. To all of you who have an interest in Java and the Javanese we direct an urgent prayer: help us to realize our aim so that it may bring improvement to our people and our sex!
>
> Educate the Javanese woman, develop her heart and intellect, and you friends of Java will find good co-workers for your noble, beautiful, huge task: the civilizing, the development and the uplifting of a nation! (August 1901)

The extravagant flourish of the last sentence appears calculated to attract the attention of a Dutch public and was possibly the 'controversial' letter Nellie later proposed to publish. (See Kartini's letter to Rosa, 28 July 1902.)

In terms of events, the year is dominated by the news of the betrothal and marriage of her younger sister, Kardinah or Kleintje (Little One). The emotional turmoil this occasioned appears to have directly contributed to a series of long illnesses in the family. Kartini's emotional response is clearly evident in her long melancholic letter of 29 November. Nevertheless her sister's impending marriage and departure served only to sharpen Kartini's resolve. In the first place, the fact that she had avoided this fate herself – Kartini indicates the possibility that she, as the eldest, was being considered as the marriage candidate – may have made her more determined than ever to persevere in achieving her goals. Witnessing at close hand the impact of an arranged marriage (with a cousin) intensified her criticism of such traditions, and in a long letter to Stella (11 October) Kartini once again sets out the options for her future. These now involve only herself and Roekmini, but are once again focused on a plan to

study in the Netherlands which was now again being carefully investigated. But at the same time, Kartini was also becoming increasingly concerned, not only about her father's health but of distancing herself from 'her people'.

The various potential futures that all appeared possible at the beginning of the year were beginning to crystallize and narrow towards its end. In a subsequent letter to Stella (24 October) Kartini reveals that Rosa had suggested what was to become Kartini's best-known activity: to establish a small school of her own. It was a suggestion which at the time resonated with an emerging concern about the need to maintain her links with 'her people'. It was also practical and immediately realizable and begins to open up the possibility of a future direction away from Europe. Kartini was also increasingly despondent about another of her alternative plans: that of becoming a writer on Javanese society. After a series of heart-wrenching letters generated by the imminent marriage of her younger sister, Kartini summarizes another important 'possible' future at the end of lengthy letter of 21 December: the prospect of becoming a writer. She had been invited to contribute to the colony-based women's journal, *De Echo*, which had earlier published two of her stories. The editor had:

> suggested I begin a conversation between 2 daughters of Regents. Anonymity, should it be necessary, was absolutely guaranteed. Also insights into our life would be useful. I gave the letter to Father to read, received permission, but before I could do anything it was revoked. For the time being I could not voice my opinion – again it was a case of: later… (Kartini to Rosa Abendanon, 21 December 1901)

This is further indication that Kartini had already established contact with a wider circle than that indicated in the published correspondence, most likely as a direct consequence of her participation in the National Exhibition of Women's Work. If so, this also suggests that her participation had formed part of an already established 'project' to gain the attention of the Dutch feminist movement. In any event, it had certainly ignited the interest of a number of reform-minded organizations and individuals in the Netherlands and the colony. The letter Kartini refers to also suggests, in particular, that European women in the colony, readers of and contributors to the colonial women's periodical, *De Echo* (which doubtless included Marie Ovink-Soer) were consciously engaged with the new ideas emerging at this time. Earlier contact with the journal's editor, Mev. ter Horst had already resulted in the publication of two of her short stories, probably written in the course of 1898 or early 1899, and published anonymously. While these were of slight literary merit, they did reflect the same themes evident in her correspondence (see Part Three below). Above all this

letter points to one possible future that later a married and socially established Kartini may have pursued: that of a writer publishing in her own (married) name.

In the course of 1901 Kartini also begins her close involvement in the promotion of Javanese craft. Initially responding to requests from the Abendanons, Kartini gradually becomes a central figure in the production and sale of Jepara woodcraft. Eventually she is confirmed as an official agent for Oost en West, the Netherlands-based public organization established to promote an interest in and knowledge of and support for indigenous Indies' societies and cultures. There is reference to her involvement in the plan to mount an exhibition of native craft in Batavia (Kartini 30 September) and in an initiative by Abendanon (as Director of Native Industry) to mount an exhibition of indigenous craft work in Surabaya in 1903 that Abendanon had announced earlier in the year. This latter project envisaged an exhibition exclusively devoted to arts and crafts produced across the archipelago. It was intended to later provide the basis of a permanent exhibition of native craft 'with the aim of providing foreign visitors with an opportunity to view and purchase these items' (*De Locomotief*, 26 April 1901). Often overlooked, this theme in the correspondence not only reflects a key activity which consumed much of Kartini's attention but also defines the nature of a key 'ethnographic' strand in the new interest in 'the native' being expressed in contemporary Europe

Correspondence for this year, therefore, suggested many possibilities for Kartini's future. One of these, suggested by her sister's acquiescence to an arranged marriage, was one she was not – as yet – prepared to contemplate.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

1 January 1901

My own dearest Mevrouw

Our heartiest good wishes for the New Year and the new Century to you both and to your trio in Europe,

What a world of thoughts fills my brain in writing down those words: the new Century! What will it bring Mankind? But no, let me now not dream, I want to cheerfully chat with my dear angel.

This afternoon our cousin from the Doctor-Jawa school[1] came to visit us. I saw him first and the first thing I heard him say (in Dutch) was: 'I bring you

[1] Formally known as STOVIA, it provided Dutch language education and training for Indonesian doctors commonly known as 'Doctor-Jawa'. This provides the key evidence

greetings from Mevrouw…' 'Abendanon!' I interrupted joyfully. Poor boy, he had a hard time accounting for himself, his ears are now probably still buzzing with the storm of questions which broke around his ears this afternoon. It is wonderful to be able to meet and speak with someone who has freshly arrived directly from Batavia from my one and only 'Kalong'. I could only speak with him briefly, but tomorrow he will come again and I will be able to make it up to him then. Then he will have to tell me everything that he knows about a certain house in Kebon Sirih – or better still about a certain 'Kalong' family.

Over Christmas we had a few people to stay, among them 2 girls, one of whom – a friend of ours – will be going to Batavia in early January. She is a prospective teacher.[2] On the first day of Christmas we went out boating! What a trip! It was meant to be a pleasure trip – but it turned out to be a formidable crying party. We all had tears in our eyes and blood-drained lips. The sea was so terribly turbulent – once we had left the river mouth we could not re-enter it, try as we might – we had to complete our trip around the Kelor Peninsula to land at Klein Scheveningen. The two visitors were completely exhausted. Even I felt strange. In the beginning I successfully laughed it off – the sensation which was threatening to overwhelm me but, then, when the prauw began to gallop ever faster and the sun was shining so sharply in my face – I had to surrender to it. But despite that, it was still fun. What a cheer went up when the prauw finally lay moored at the boathouse. On disembarking, we could not wait till the gangplank that they were bringing out was ready – we just jumped out of the prauw straight into the water. That was certainly refreshing! The visitors really suffered and remained seasick for the rest of the day.

When the sea is a little calmer we will go out again – our Ass. Resident will treat us to a sailing trip. He would like to see us as sweet girls once again but he will not succeed – we will not be caught so easily. Everyone here was amused when they heard that we were so unwell in the prauw this morning.

Yesterday Father received a letter from Dr Anton in Malang – around the middle of January the Anton family will go to Jombang to visit the Ovink family and this afternoon we received a letter from Mevr. Ovink. The afternoon was therefore full of treats for us. She writes in such a chatty and lively way. She is sending me a book of hers that has been recently published – though

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for believing that Kartini was in touch with this important group of young, Dutch-educated and progressive intellectuals who emerged from this institution even though there is no extant correspondence.

2 This is evidently a reference to a European and it is perhaps significant that Kartini does not make a point of mentioning this.

we have not yet received it, perhaps tomorrow.[3] I am at the moment engaged with a thick volume: *'Moderne Maagden'* by M. Prevost[4], translated from the French. Elsie Soer – Mevr. Ovink's sister – recently wrote a nice piece in *De Holl[andsche] Lelie* some time ago entitled 'Wat de Kerst Engel bracht'.[5] She is also such a dear woman – her sister is very attached to her – she is both a sister and mother to her at the same time.

The wedding of the Queen[6] will no doubt be allowed to pass here with little fuss I think, at least we have heard nothing about any planned festivities on that day. Now that the Residency of Jepara has been integrated with Semarang the officials here will no doubt have to join the celebration in Semarang on the occasion of the wedding of H.M. And we will stay home – hooray – we want nothing to do with parties!

Mevrouw Anton has ordered a few items of woodcarving and asked me to send them to you when they are completed towards the end of January – since the A. family will then also be in Batavia. She also ordered a screen; like the one we have. When the craftsman has delivered the small items he is now making for Mevr. Anton he will be free. Do you have work for him? Don't you think the small boxes that he delivered to you last week are exquisite? The screen for Mevr. Rooseboom[7] is almost finished. You will see it for yourself later when it is in Buitenzorg so I won't tell you anything about it now.

Goodbye, dearest Mevrouw, our very warmest greetings to you both and for yourself a warm hand from the one who loves you,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

31 January 1901

Hello my dearest! Here I am again finally! Nice of me, eh, to keep you without news for so long – I hate myself for it, so there! I had wanted to write to you immediately after receiving your letter and had already begun a letter to you but as it so often happens, there was an interruption. I could not finish it that

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3 This may have been Ovink-Soer's *In het Zonneland: Indische Roman* (1898). Marie Ovink-Soer became best known for her children's book, *De Canneheuveltjes in Indië* (1912) and from 1925, her children's periodical, *Zonneschijn: Tijdschrift voor de jeugd*.

4 Dutch translation (1900) of Marcel Prévost (1862–1941), *Les Demi-Vierges* (1894), a sensationalist account of the impact of education on young women in Paris.

5 'What the Christmas angel brought'. Elsie Soer was a less well-known writer.

6 On 7 February 1901 Queen Wilhelmina married Henrik, son of Frederik Frans II of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

7 This was the wife of the Governor General.

day, and then there were days in which the heart was in such an uproar, that I thought it better to be silent and wait with writing till the internal storms had calmed down. Puasa and Lebaran[8] also brought with them so much activity and on top of that there was also illness. Now all the commotion is behind us – it is quiet and peaceful around and inside me – now I may speak with you, dearest.

First of all, my dearest one, my beloved, my closest friend, thank you for your wonderfully kind letter – I was and remain utterly happy with it! I had not thought I would receive an answer from you so soon – knowing how incredibly busy you always are. It was a great surprise when so soon after having sent my letter, Brother brought me yours – I am doubly grateful to you for it.

When I had read that dear letter which spoke to me of so much love, so much faith, I sat quietly for a long time, not moving, staring straight ahead of me – the storm of realization which marched through me, the massive torrent of thoughts which arose in me – were too much for me. It buzzed and roared in my head, I could not think – not feel. I was as though dazed. But slowly the fog lifted from my confused brain and then I saw you before me, my dear, kind Angel, my friend and benefactress so clearly – with a dear smile on your lips, a kind look in your eyes – that I put my hand out to take yours. The movement startled me and then the mist cleared. Then a voice, sounding loudly above the buzzing and roaring in my head asked: 'For what have I earned that beautiful love, that wonderful, limitless faith, from such a fine, noble heart?' For what? And I went over everything in my mind – searched and searched – and honestly, I could find nothing that justified such a love, such faith.

Deep in thought I directed my glance outside, staring at the blue sky, as if expecting an answer there for the tempestuous questions in my soul. Unconsciously my eyes followed the course of the clouds across the sky as they disappeared behind the waving foliage of the palms, when my eye fell on some glistening, shimmering leaves, sparkling with golden sunlight and suddenly it flashed in my head: 'Does one ever ask why the sun shines? To whom, to what she sends her beams of sunshine?' Oh, my sun, my golden sun, I shall live so that I will be worthy to be shined on by you – shined upon, cherished, warmed by your inspiring, beautifying, noble light! There, my dear one, my hand!

I shall earn your beautiful love, your wonderful faith – that love and faith of yours ennobles me. I know: *noblesse oblige*. So with all my ability I shall strive to fulfil that obligation. How thankful I am, oh, so thankful, that I have found

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8 Puasa is the Muslim month of fasting. Lebaran is the celebration marking the end of the Muslim fasting month.

you – light of my soul! Truly! To me it is as though I have become another – better – person and my life has become oh, so much more beautiful since that lucky, most lucky star brought you both to us. No, dearest, never, I will never again treat that gift from God called Life lightly – it has for me now one great value, now that it has been given a purpose by you through your love and trust. I am so happy, so at peace. I no longer fear life; whatever circumstances I may find myself in, so long as I continue to have that golden treasure of your friendship – then I could never be completely unhappy.

The thought of you both gives me strength in difficult times – a comfort, a light – when around me it is so black and dark. Through the heaviest veil of tears it allows me to see the Ideal that shines high above, above the material world – pure, holy, untouched. I have always believed in the Good, in the existence of the Good and now that I know you both, nothing shall be able to take that belief from me. I know the Good exists.

And however horrible the reality with which I may be confronted – it will not be able to overwhelm me, crush my inner life, now that I know that in that same world of reality a Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon live – now that I personally know those ambassadors from God, those noble idealists from whom a blessed, ennobling, purifying influence comes forth. Oh, would that all people could meet such noble, beautiful souls in their lives – that would be a blessing.

How grateful I am to you for your kind thoughts about my brother.[9] It will then no doubt please you to know that recently Father again received very favourable reports about him from Holl. from his guardian. I was ill when Father gave me that wonderful letter; my health improved immediately as a result. And I think it is wonderful that you are so happy with that painting – I thought, I hoped that it would appeal to you because it was made in those days, oh, I am so happy![10]

Thank you also very much for returning the letters to me and for the *f*10 – you sent *f*0.80 too much, shall I keep it for you for an eventual order?

And now I come to the point that will no doubt interest you most – on the very evening I received your letter, I passed on to Father the message from Mijnheer regarding the petition. Father approves and will send in the

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9 As reported in the correspondence of Kartini's sisters, on their return to the Netherlands, the Abendanons continued to assist Kartono financially and by providing moral support during his troubled university life (Coté 2008). Their home was also the meeting place of the society of Indonesian students, the Indische Vereeniging, forerunner of Perhimpunan Indonesia.

10 This possibly refers to Kartini's painting of Klein Scheveningen.

application.[11] My deepest thanks to you both. Like you, I hope we will not receive a zero in response to the petition – but should that be the case, please do not be sad – and particularly do not be sad, dearest, if I go to Mojowarno. You have both done what you could for this child, in whom you both have an interest, to provide a good position in society. It will not be your fault should it not succeed. Therefore, no sorrow, dearest, should the result of the petition be unfavourable – my life is thereby not yet lost. It is always possible to make something beautiful of it – I want to and I shall. He, who serves the Good does not live in vain – and he who seeks the Good will naturally find Happiness, in the true sense: peace of the soul. And that may also be found in Mojowarno – who knows, perhaps there more readily than elsewhere. Do not be sad! We are already so grateful that in any case the basis of our desires will be met there: to be free, independent, emancipated and as midwives we can make ourselves so useful.

I have thought so long and so much about education, especially in recent days, and believe it is such a high and sacred task, that I think it would be a crime for me to engage in it if I was not completely equal to it. It still has to be seen whether I will be of any value as an educator. For me education means the nurturing and shaping of the spirit and the soul – oh, I could never be at peace with myself if I were not able to fulfil my role in the way that I myself would demand of a good educator – even if others were not dissatisfied with me. I feel so strongly that in the development of the intellect, the task of the educator has not been fulfilled – cannot be complete – if he has not also paid attention to the formation of character. Even though no written law compels, morally he is duty bound. And I ask myself, would I be capable – I, who myself am so in need of education? So often I hear it asserted that the one naturally flows from the other – through intellectual development, conscience is automatically refined, ennobled – but I have come to learn, unfortunately, that this is so often not the case, that intellectual development is no guarantee of morality. One cannot be critical, I think, of those whose conscience, despite intellectual development, remains unrefined because in most cases the fault lies not with themselves but in their education; care was taken – oh, great care in fact was taken – in the cultivation of their intellect but what was done with the formation of their character? Nothing! Oh, I subscribe enthusiastically to Mijnheer's '*Gedachte*', which are so clearly discernible in the circular regarding

[11] This refers to the much-delayed proposal to request government financial support for Kartini's further education as a teacher. The consequence was that Abendanon could now write a memorandum to the Governor General.

the education of Native girls: the woman as the carrier of Civilization! [12] It is not because the woman is necessarily the most suitable for this role but because I too am utterly convinced that the woman can have a very significant impact, whether for good or for evil, in life; that she can most contribute to raising the moral standard of the human race. From a woman people receive their first education – it is on her lap that the child learns; to feel, to think, to speak – and more and more I come to realize that early education is not without significance for the rest of life. And how can Native mothers educate their children if they themselves are uneducated?

That is why I am so convinced about the divine plan of Mijnheer to give Native girls education and training. I realized long ago that only this could bring change to the sad existence of Native women. And not only for women but the education of girls will be a blessing for the entire Native society!

Everywhere we hear people talking about the establishment of schools for Native girls – how our eyes shine and our heart beats when we hear our people speaking with appreciation and approval of Mijnheer's divine idea and often we have to bite our tongue not to burst into jubilant shouting – clench our hands together tightly not to voice our enthusiasm too loudly. And in the world of the Native woman itself, as far as we know, there is enthusiasm for it. It is so wonderful to see that enthusiasm! Everyone with whom we speak about it wishes they could be children again to be able to profit from education. And, wonderful, that at the Native schools of Pati, Kudus, Jepara and elsewhere[13] in the region, the first physical signs of Mijnheer's fine work can be seen: already several peasant girls are going to school and their number is increasing. Tomorrow Ma will also send a young girl, a half orphan and foster child of Ma, to school and last month our parents allowed a serious young clerk to take Dutch lessons.

Now we are once more back into our routine – thank God! We have lots to read. We received new books some time ago already but because of all the activity we have only been able to begin to enjoy them now. When I have finished *Wij Beiden* by Lyall[14] – which is very good – I will read *De Ziel van een Volk*, by Fielding,[15] which is regarded as very fine. It deals with

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12 This is a reference to the Director of Education's circular of November 1900 on the need for education for 'native girls'. The suggestion was opposed.

13 These are the Second Class Native elementary schools, established in most larger towns in Java. First Class Native elementary schools (where Dutch was taught) were limited to residential capitals.

14 Ada Ellen Bayly (pseudonym. Edna Lyall) (1857–1903), *We Two* (1884). This dealt with the life of a progressive thinker and social reformer.

15 Harold Fielding (1859–1917), *The soul of a people* (1898). This described Buddhist society in Burma.

Buddhism. Do you know it? If not, may I send it to you to read, later when you have time to read again? Then we have *Marcella* by Humphry Ward;[16] *Barthold Meryan* (about social issues) by C. Huygens;[17] *Van 't Viooltje dat Weten Wilde* by Marie Koning[18] – fairytales; *Ben Hur* by Wallace; Multatuli's *Bloemlezing*;[19] *Deficit* by Carmen Sylva;[20] *De Lelie van 's-Gravenhage* and *Toneelspelers* by Cremer[21] (these last two sister won as a quiz prize). From Prof. Anton I received Multatuli's *Vorstenschool*[22] – which I greatly enjoyed. Amongst our new treasures is the long-coveted *De Kleine Johannes* by F. van Eeden.[23]

We are delighted with these treasures of books! If only there was someone here with whom we could discuss what we have read, that would be wonderful! Now we have to do that on paper and have to wait so long for an answer – because these book discussions go all the way to Holland.[24] And by the time you get a reply you have half forgotten the story – if you have neglected to make notes. But in our neighbourhood a young girl has recently returned home – a most charming and decent girl – who is thoughtful and sensitive and serious. We are very fond of her – she is a dear – the dearest girl we know. Her mother is German – she is also a dear, dear woman – whom we are all very fond of. Agnes – our young friend – is a writer; has written her first novel – a nice children's story.[25] The child really has talent; in time she will develop into a fine, decent writer. We are all very proud of her – I think you would like her if you came to know her – she is such a lovable child – and so beautiful! She would very much like to continue with her studies but she is not allowed to by her doctor. Poor thing, she is having trouble with her eyes.

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16 Mary Augusta (Humphry) Ward (1851–1920), *Marcella* (1894). This dealt with the life of a woman attracted to socialism. Ward was a prominent writer.

17 Cornélie Huygens (1848–1902), *Barthold Meryan*, (1897). This concerned a man's discovery of socialism and feminist ideas.

18 Marie Metz-Koning (1864-1926), *The Little Violet Who Wanted to Know.* Koning became best known as a poet and was closely linked to the group of influential *fin de siècle* Dutch writers.

19 E Douwes Dekker (Multatuli) (1820–1887), *Selections. Bloemlezing* was initially published in 1888. Numerous editions of Douwes Dekker's work were published in the 1890s around the turn of the century.

20 Carmen Sylva (Queen Elizabeth of Romania) (1843–1916), (Ger. Defizit) *Deficit* (1890).

21 JJ Cremer (1820–1880) *The Lily of 's-Gravenhage,* (1851); *Actors* (1876).

22 E Douwes Dekker (Multatuli), *School for Chiefs* (play) (1872).

23 Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932) was the leading writer of the modernist school, De Tachtigers, the literary movement of the 1880s. His book, *De Kleine Johannes* (The Young Johannes) was widely acclaimed by supporters of the movement.

24 The reference is to Stella Zeehandelaar.

25 This writer could not be identified.

We have here a nice Controleur's family – our brother and sister, as we call him and her.[26] They were everything to us in those dark days of our father's illness. Real children could not have been nicer to our father than the Quarteros were during father's illness. They came every morning and evening to call in on father and were so concerned. They loyally stood by us in those anxious days with advice and deeds. When the sisters were ill we also received wonderful assistance from her. She looked after sister K[ardinah] when she herself was unwell. One does not have to know another person for years to become close intimate friends – we can agree with that, eh dearest? We had only known you for only several hours when I already knew that in you I had found a true friend. Heer Q was Controleur in the mountains for 7 years – these were their happiest years, she told us. There, living miles from the nearest doctor, they had had to help themselves in times of sickness and so had taught themselves about nursing – and also because Mijnheer had made a special study of it. We profited from their wonderful knowledge! They are both dear people – both Indian.[27] She is a dear, simple woman who also feels a great deal for women's issues. They have 2 daughters in Holland – both have to study for their vocation – the youngest girl wants to be a lawyer. Mijnheer who is an enthusiast,[28] is very much in favour of women's emancipation – also for progress in every area. He is entirely in support of Mijnheer's marvellous plan to establish Native girls' schools. His enthusiasm did us good!

He knew Mevr. Bauman[29] – the aunt of your boys – very well when she was a young girl in Batavia and met her again in The Hague when he was there the year before last. When we were with you they had just returned from furlough – they had come by the same boat to which Mijnheer had brought us that Sunday morning at Tanjong Priok.[30] They were also at the Concordia and saw us there, little suspecting that soon afterwards we would mean so much to each other. The Q. family had come to know very well a friend of you both in Probolingo; Raden Mas Ismangoen,[31] and regard him highly. R.M.I. had once stayed with her in the mountains. It seems that the Q.'s will not be staying here long since Heer Q. is first in line for promotion to Ass[istant] Res[ident].

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26 The reference is to Controleur WP Quartero.

27 Kartini is clearly indicating they are Indian, that is from British India, not Indisch, that is, a person of mixed Dutch and Javanese descent.

28 This term, a literal translation of (D.) 'enthusiast', applied to an avid supporter of modern ideas for social reform, including feminism.

29 This person could not be identified.

30 Tanjong Priok was the port of Batavia. It indicates that Kartini returned to Semarang in 1900 by ship.

31 For Raden Mas Ismangoen see above Kartini to Stella Zeehandelaar, 13 January 1900.

Father will miss him terribly when he goes; they get on so well together and work together very well.

Our friend is also an artist – paints beautifully and also models clay nicely. During his leave he attended an arts and technology academy in The Hague.

How terribly unpleasant for you that I am constantly telling you about people who you don't know. Forgive me – we are so fond of them. The proverb is so true: 'That of which the heart is full the mouth overflows with'.

Father is well – one can no longer tell that he has been so ill – and is already making long, tiring official tours of inspection without ill effect. The first time that Father went out his daughters accompanied him. Oh, I cannot tell you how very happy I am that our dear Father has completely returned to health again.

How do you like our photo – is it not frightfully conceited? There we are showing ourselves as the Regent's daughters. You hadn't thought, had you, that your friends could be so prim – or be such proud little things? For this occasion – when last July we went to the photographer in Semarang – we had made ourselves very neat. But then, it was for you!

Yesterday we nearly had an accident at sea. Two large prauws – we were on board one of them – had sailed into each other. The ladies started screaming but we had fun and found the adventure very interesting.

Will you write to us again very soon? We long so very much to hear from you again. But if you are still too busy – then let it be, all right? We will learn to wait.

Now I take my leave – it is already very late – my sisters have long ago gone to dreamland but before they went to bed they asked me to send you both their heartiest greetings.

Goodnight dearest – all my love, with a loving kiss.

Your own
Kartini

To Stella Zeehandelaar

9 January 1901

Change will come to the Native world, if not because of us then through others. Emancipation is in the air – it is ordained. And who ever Fate has chosen to have 'the new' as their spiritual mother, must suffer. It is an eternal law of nature: those who give birth must come to experience the pains of giving birth but the child who we all love, even before others come to know of

its existence, the child that comes to us through suffering and pain, is utterly dear to us.

* * * *

Oh, nothing is more miserable than to feel the energy within one but be doomed to inactivity. Thank God! Thank God! This curse has been taken away from me. Recently a professor from Jena came to visit us. Dr Anton and his wife came to make our acquaintance while on his travels in relation to his studies.[32]

I am so worried that too much is imagined of us. I am sure that people are allowing themselves to be misled by the fascination of the new and perhaps also through sympathy. To many people we are something new; even to people from here, and everything new is more or less prized. The professor imagined we were still half wild and discovered us to be no different than other people; the only thing that was foreign was the colour of our skin, our clothing and the surroundings and these give a certain cachet to what is just ordinary. Do we not feel ourselves honoured if we see our own ideas reflected in the thoughts of others? And when the other is a stranger, someone of another race, from another part of the world, of different blood, colour, morals and customs, then this increases even more the fascination of the spiritual bond. I am sure that people would not pay us one quarter of the attention we now receive if, instead of sarong and kebaya, we wore dresses; if, instead of Javanese names, we had Dutch names; and European blood instead of Javanese blood flowed through our veins.

Just recently we received from women friends a present of several books including that wonderful book by B. V. Suttner, *De Wapens Neergelegd*.[33] I have also read several other books of which, in particular, *Moderne Maagden*[34] moved and disturbed me since I discovered there many of the things that I have thought, felt and experienced myself. I can only say that Marcel Prévost has observed well and has been able to express his impressions, thoughts and feelings brilliantly. Even though I am now just as far from finding a solution for the great question as I was before making the acquaintance of *M. M.*, I had never before seen the goals of the women's movement so plainly and clearly set out and with such truth and forcefulness. I do not hold it against

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32 Professor G. Anton, a German national, was professor of political science at the University of Jena. He was in the Indies to study Dutch colonial policy. He had previously published a paper advocating the merger of the Netherlands into the German Reich (see Introduction).

33 Bertha von Suttner, *Die Waffen Nieder!* (1899).

34 Marcel Prévost, *Les Demi-Vierges* (1894).

him that the writer was unable to prevent himself from indulging in the rather childish amusement of, for instance, making all the fighters for the women's movement except for Fedi and Lea totally ugly, handicapped and misshapen. What wonderful words, so true and so beautiful, he gave to Punet to speak towards the end of the book – that lovable, malformed disciple of the women's movement – words that so clearly reveal the aim of the women's movement. I enjoyed it even more because a man had thought of them and had written them.

Just before I read the book I had written long letters to my two closest girlfriends here.[35] Had I written to them after getting to know *M. M.*, the same letters would have been written but under the influence of what I had read, there was such a degree of concurrence between these confidential letters and much of what was in that book.

I wish I had someone here to talk to about *M. M.* It contains so much that I would love to discuss with someone with wide experience and knowledge of life.

I have so much to tell you about the establishment of schools for Native girls – it has become such a public matter – and about so many other things but I have to be brief today. One thing I do want to tell you is that the plan by Mijnheer Abendanon is being received everywhere with great enthusiasm. There are many influential European government officials who support his proposals warmly and it is upon their support that the success of the plan of our friend depends. We have many friends amongst the European government officials and they will strongly support Mijnheer Abendanon's endeavours to improve the world of the Native women from its centuries-old state of wretchedness. There are also many whom we do not know personally who are well disposed to it. Later I will send you a copy of Mijnheer A.'s circular regarding the establishment of these schools which he sent to the heads of regional administrations.[36] He mentioned not a word about the education of Native boys, his whole attention is focused on the education of girls. He says:

> In all times, the advancement of the women has been an important factor in the civilization of a people.

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35 Kartini is clearly referring to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri and Marie Ovink-Soer, both the wives of colonial officials and both much older. Her relationship with Hilda de Booij-Boissevain who was almost the same age as Kartini was slight although later Hilda did much to promote awareness the cause of the Kartini Schools.

36 Negative reactions from Javanese regents to Abendanon's memorandum on the need for education for indigenous girls were outlined in the Director's memorandum to the Governor General of 31 October 1901. Formal rejection of Abendanon's proposal was contained in a government memorandum of 19 December 1901. See also Kartini to Stella Zeehandelaar, May 1901.

> The intellectual development of the native population cannot rapidly advance if the woman is left behind in this process.
>
> The woman as the bearer of civilisation…

Stella, does your heart not beat warmly for our friend? He has also done quite a lot for the education of boys and for the education of the European community.

Over the last half year a strong interest is evident amongst Natives in learning your beautiful language. Many Europeans regard this development with concern, but many noble-minded Europeans applaud it and encourage it enthusiastically. In several regional capitals Dutch language courses are popping up like mushrooms, attended by young children as well as by adult men who have been in government service for years.

Many influential government leaders, with the Governor General at their head, are very much in favour of spreading knowledge of the Dutch language amongst Natives as a means of civilizing them and bringing the Javanese closer to the Dutch whom they should regard not as feared guardians but as beloved ones. In this way, one day, the dream of my dear brother and that of many noble thinking Europeans will be realized.

Rejoice with me, Stella.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Jepara 5 February 1901

Dearest Mevrouw,

Just a few words to tell you we have received your letter and the dear little Christmas angels. For both, many thanks – the angels now hang suspended in our room. We hope that they will bring us some good fortune.

Now about the petition – Father will send it in as soon as festivities are over. I just wanted to inform you of this because this is what you wanted to know as soon as possible. A long letter is in preparation – you will receive it when festivities are over, you will then have more opportunity for reading. How wonderful Christmas is! In our imagination we saw the wonderfully beautiful Christmas tree and, the most wonderful thing of all, the ecstatic faces of the children! Goodbye my dear kind Angel! Once again thanks for our angels!

We wish you much joy at the festivities! With a hearty kiss from us three for you and a respectful greeting to Mijnheer.

Your own
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 February 1901
2 o'clock at night

Dearest Mevrouw, it seems that I am only writing you notes these days – again I have to put the promised long letter aside for an unspecified time and now write you a few hurried and scribbled words. Kleintje has suddenly fallen very ill – it seems to be a very heavy cold. This morning we had some very anxious hours – the day before yesterday the illness began with a light fever – yesterday she was up and about again but this morning it suddenly became very bad. She suffered terribly – it was terrible to see and there was no doctor. Now thank God, she is again much better and at the moment she is sleeping peacefully. Our parents this morning were quite desperate and did not know what to do. Fortunately, aunty from Demak[37] was here – it was thanks to her and her firm action that everything ended well. Now that Kleintje is somewhat better, it is Roekmini's turn. Poor thing, she had already been ailing for some time and the events affected and tired her greatly. At the moment she is lying down under blankets with a severe headache and temperature.

Busy and nasty days lie behind us! The festive days were spent beside a sickbed, day and night – a preparation for Mojowarno – and I can only say that my dear sisters maintained themselves bravely.

Thank you for your dear letter – as soon as possible I will write you at length – for the time being make do with this!

Goodbye dearest – from us a hearty greeting to you both.

Your own
Kartini

22/2

I slept in and this letter could not go with the post this morning. How wonderful that I can give you good tidings about Kleintje – she is free of fever and her headache has left her – only she is of course terribly weak and looks as if she has lain at death's door for a month.

Mama, who has been feeling off colour the last few days, and very upset by the terrible day yesterday, is now also on the sick list.

Roekmini was better again this morning but the fever returned in the course of the day. Poor thing – until a little while ago she was tossing in her bed moaning and groaning. Now, thank God, the fever is lessening somewhat – and she can at last sleep. I hope she can sleep for a few hours. What a to-do:

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[37] Wife of RMAA Hadiningrat. Regent of Demak.

3 patients in the house, ill servants and little Soematri is also beginning to be unwell. Only Pa, Kartinah, our young brother and I are well.

We are receiving wonderful help from our little Kartinah – she is such an energetic and handy little thing. She is looking after Kardinah while I am sitting with R, and she is doing it extremely well.

Goodbye dearest! It will be March before I can have a long chat with you! Be patient till then, the long letter will come! As soon as our sick ones have recovered I will write it. Goodbye. 3:30 in the morning.

23/2

7:30 in the morning – all patients are, thank God, doing well. May it continue so.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

8 March 1901

Dearest Mevrouw, there is something terrible. You will recall that man with wife and children about whom I had been so concerned?[38] Well, that little package was not intended for me, was never meant for me, but for Kleintje! I first learnt about it two weeks ago, as did Kleintje, from Roekmini, who got it from Ma who has just now told me herself. She followed this by saying that the wedding would take place very soon in the second half of the year.

The publicizing of Kleintje's imminent and spectacular wedding is being delayed only for the sake of her older sisters – it is thought to be so immensely painful for R and I that Kleintje, the youngest will precede us in marriage! Our parent's hearts are breaking with sympathy for us! The trip to Batavia was to comfort us! And Kleintje herself is so very happy, that from pure happiness she nearly entered eternity. This was the cause of her suddenly falling so seriously ill – the tidings of Job brought her to the edge of the grave. A day after being given that piece of news (we regarded it as our duty to warn her) she became ill and the third day she floated between heaven and earth. R. has also become ill as a result.

Now that they have both completely recovered again and Kleintje is calm and at peace. She is no longer afraid that the wedding will take place – she only fears the moment when she is alone with Ma and Pa – but when it comes

[38] This is a further reference to the possible marriage that Kartini refers to in a letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, 21 December 1900.

to it she will not be afraid. It is only the idea of it – waiting for it – which is torturing her and us.

The storm will pass over all three of us – you understand, our sister will not stand alone. We – R and I – have tried to avoid the storm but it cannot be avoided, be overcome. Well, if it is going to storm, then storm please break with a mighty force upon us, thunder – but not this torturing, tormenting waiting. Kleintje would prefer to die than enter that marriage and if Ma should command her to do so she will go, with or without permission, to Mojowarno. If she can, she will become a midwife, if not, then she will remain a nurse at a hospital. At Mojowarno she will continue working till she falls down dead – she says. Oh, poor darling! Why her, why especially she, the child who seemed to have been born to good fortune? She, who we so very much want to see happy – to make happy. But rather, a thousand times rather, that she be a nursing sister for the rest of her life, than that marriage.

Oh Father, we have such an indescribable love for you! Such great trust!

Now we also understand why there has been such a delay and hesitation about Mojowarno and with the petition – they are so terribly concerned about the opinion of the 'world'; the 'world' which will have such fun when they see us tending and mending our broken hearts when we are not desired.

R and I are immediately going to Father to bring this torment to an end – this torturous waiting.

Oh God! How will it end? She will not give in! She is so wonderfully proud by nature and manner. She can only stand straight up or break – bend, never! We shall be soft – as you advised – but if softness does not help?

Oh we had so hoped that we could leave our parents in a state of peace…

Goodbye dearest! Our warmest greetings to you both, pray for us and especially for her – the pet of us both.

Your own,
Kartini

9/3

Was unable to speak to Father yesterday, but today it will happen – it must.

With this I am sending you several pages of writing – part of the long letter – that I had begun so long ago but have still not been able to complete – the remainder will arrive in bits and pieces.[39]

Goodbye.

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[39] The reference may be to drafts of Kartini's account of their first meeting. These pages appear not to have survived.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

12 March 1901
Postcard

Dearest Mevrouw,

How sorry we were to hear that Mijnheer is unwell. We sincerely hope that when you receive this, his ill health will again be a matter of the past.

The three photograph boxes have been ordered but I still do not know whether the carpenter will be able to get sono wood of those dimensions – he will, of course, make every effort. I will send you news about this later.

Patience is the word. With our warmest regards,

Your,
Kartini

To Dr Nicolaus Adriani

19 March 1901

Most Esteemed Doctor Adriani[40]

I have wanted to write to you for a long time but all kinds of activities including the illness of almost my entire family prevented me from carrying out my intentions. Now that the entire population of the kabupaten, big and little, can now take pleasure in the fact that they have all returned to complete health I don't want to let this letter that I have long had in my thoughts, and on which you had perhaps been waiting, to remain unwritten any longer. Forgive me if you had been.

I myself have been so much looking forward to being able to write these lines in order in the first place, to heartily thank you for your friendly letter to my sister Roekmini, and for your kind gift of books that we three were and still are so pleased with. We also think and often talk about your Torajas, your work, in short everything about what we learnt from you that evening at the house of the Abendanon family.[41] That evening, in your company is one of our dearest memories of our stay in Batavia. We sincerely hope that that will not be the only time that we meet but that there will many more such meetings. Meeting you again, and talking with you, has been one of our dreams since

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40 This was Kartini's first letter to Adriani whom she had met in Batavia in 1900.

41 Adriani was attached to the Christian mission as Bible translator. He and his mission colleague Albert Kruyt were the first Europeans to have identified the Pamona people of Central Sulawesi as 'Toraja' previously they had commonly been referred to generically as 'Alfurs'.

leaving Batavia. What a great joy it will be when in due course we can welcome you to Jepara.

You were not mistaken, we indeed have much sympathy for the work of the Christian mission in the Netherlands Indies and we are interested in everything concerning that work, the efforts and the lives of those noble of heart who station themselves in the most remote regions, wildernesses, far removed from their own country and blood and spiritual relations; in short from the rest of the world where on the basis of birth, orientation, education they belong, in order to improve the lives of their fellow man whom in the 'civilized world' are called wild.

I studied with great interest your two articles and I am grateful that you provided us with the opportunity to learn so many important things that are all new to us.[42]

Recently we re-read *Maatschappelijke Werk in Indië* [43]and just like after the last time we read it we lingered over the accounts of the Christian mission in the Netherlands-Indies. Oh, my heart beats so warmly for those noble men and women who undertake that work which is so rich and beautiful but also so heavy, with such love and commitment, and with heart and soul!

In 1896 we had the honour and pleasure to attend a ceremony that will probably be the only such event we will experience in our life-time; the inauguration of a new church at Kedung Penjalin.[44] It was the first time that we had entered a Christian church and attended a service. And everything we saw and heard on that occasion left a strong impression on us. It is now a long time ago but it still remains fresh in my memory. The singing that rose up from so many throats to reverberate throughout the large building beautifully decorated in green was so beautiful. We joined the respectful congregation below in listening attentively to what was being said in excellent Javanese from the pulpit. Apart from Heer Hubert there were another three missionaries who spoke in turn. And when an ancient Javanese stood up to address his countrymen and fellow believers, it was far from being the least formal moment in the entire occasion.

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42 Adriani writes on 29 January 1901 to his wife that he had received a letter from Kartini and sent her 'several editions of the mission journal *Zaaiing en Oost* (Sowing and Harvest)' and an article of 'Our Trip to Tojo' (Kraemer and Adriani 1935: 127).

43 This was a collection of reports presented to a Congress held in conjunction with the National Exhibition of Women's Work in The Hague, 1898. Like Kartini, Adriani had also contributed exhibits to the Exhibition providing artefacts from central Sulawesi.

44 Kedung Penjalin was a Baptist mission centre near Jepara. Kartini refers here to its pastor, Johan Hubert Martini.

All in all it was very impressive. But there was something else that made that occasion so unforgettable for me. That morning was the first time, since I had left school, that I had seen the outside world again. I suppose you are aware that with us it is the custom to lock up young girls, that is to say, to strictly isolate them from the outside world until the time when a bridegroom appears, a husband, to claim her – the little cage is unlocked, the little bird flies out … in order to change cage and master. We have no interest in going 'out' as the world at large understands that word, but imprisonment, for us who so love freedom, was oh, so hard to bear. We are, therefore, so grateful to our parents that they have broken with tradition. After that blessed outing to Kedung Penjalin we began, first with long intervals in between but increasingly more often, to leave the house, going further and further away until last year we got as far as Batavia!

We read in the paper under the shipping news that Mevrouw [Adriani] has returned to the Indies and thus will soon be with you again. We are very happy for you! Together with this mail we are visiting you and your wife in the form of a photograph to wish you well with the return of your spouse and to bid her, although we haven't met her, a hearty welcome in Mapane. The Torajas must be very happy to have their 'Moeder' in their midst again.

Now my respectful and hearty regard, also on behalf of my parents and sisters to you both,

Respectfully
Yours sincerely
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

22 March 1901
Postcard

Dearest Mevrouw

My sincerest thanks for your letter. It has made me happy and I greatly look forward to answering it at length. This postcard is hateful, but in this instance something is better than nothing. We are very pleased with the beautiful Japanese cards and thank you very much for them – at the very next dinner party here we will show off with them. Many thanks for the recipe. Yesterday received a nice letter from the Anton family and several days ago one from

our great friend of the people in Mapane[45] – wonderful. Shall send you these letters later. Goodbye, much love and our warmest greetings to you both from us three.

K

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

23 March 1901
Postcard

Again a hateful postcard – it is to inform you that the 3 photograph boxes for Dr N.[46] will be in Batavia within 3 weeks. We are on the point of leaving and will be out of town for several days.

Goodbye dear Mevrouw! With our heartiest greetings to you both.

Your K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

16 April 1901

Dearest Mevrouw, in one's darkest days one needs to open one's heart to another who one is convinced understands one's suffering and so I come to you to let a breath of air into my heavy heart.

You cannot know what terrible days we have gone through. That dear, kind Father of ours is so ill – Father has improved a little but his condition is still worrying. Father himself does not know, or does not notice, how sick he in fact is and how terribly weak. The doctor prescribed absolute rest for him but Father still worries about his work. We have prayed, begged him to leave his duties for the time being – but to no avail. We are desperate. Oh, and he is forbidden any stress. Father became ill last Monday – a fever, not serious but consistent; he appeared to be better again, made a trip with us on Saturday morning and an hour after arriving home Father was suddenly unwell. Yesterday the doctor

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45 The reference is to Adriani. Mapane, a small coastal trading town, was the location of the colonial administration of the region in the vicinity of the Poso mission.

46 This is most likely a reference to Dr Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis (1864–1953) later Professor of Volkenkunde at Leiden University. He was the first European to traverse the island of Borneo from west to east. The last of his extensive explorations of Borneo was undertaken in 1898–1900. He was an early exponent of the use of anthropological photographs for which, it seems, Kartini was arranging storage boxes.

from Kudus examined him – his heart is not in order[47] – calm and quiet is required. You can imagine the state we are in – just as long I do not go mad as a result of all this grief. That on top of everything else – then our cup of suffering really would be full. You know how dear our Father is to us! Kleintje looks very poorly as a result of tiredness and lack of sleep – she is not strong yet, having just recovered from a serious illness – as long as she does not become ill again. No, no, that must not be, especially for Father's sake that must not be – she must remain well and the rest of us also for that matter, otherwise poor Father will worry about us. And poor Ma is also looking so miserable.

This afternoon I read in the paper that Mijnheer is making a tour of duty to the west coast of Sumatra on the 20th of this month. Are you going with him? In this case we wish you a pleasant trip, dearest. One of the three boxes for Dr N. arrived at our house this morning – have patience, I cannot send them to you at the moment. I am very sorry that Dr N. has had to wait so long for his boxes – when Father recovers I will send them straight away.

Goodbye dearest, our warmest greetings to Mijnheer and a kiss for you from

Your own
Kartini

To Stella Zeehandelaar

20 May 1901

I had already suffered much in my young life but all that was nothing compared to how I suffered in those intense days of my Father's illness. There were hours in which I had lost any will to live, shuddering, slumped in a moral agony – only lips defiantly proclaimed, 'Come what may', a trembling heart hesitantly whispering, 'May God have mercy'.

My birthday was a double celebration – it was also a celebration of my Father's return to health. I showed Father your present and told him how pleased you were with his photograph. Father was lying on the day bed, I sat next to him on a stool, his hand resting on my head. This is how I spoke to him about you. Father smiled when I told him of your warm, sympathetic thoughts about my dear Father and with this smile on his lips and no doubt with the thought of his distant admirer and the much-loved friend of his child, my patient fell asleep.

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47 Kartini's father was diagnosed as having a weak heart. Knowledge of her father's illness played an important role in Kartini's decision not to frustrate her father's wishes. He died of a heart attack in February 1905.

You are so close to me, to us, Stella. Do you believe me now when I tell you that it was not ill feeling which kept me silent for so long and can you now forgive me for that silence? Let me thank you once more for your friendship and your love that give so much new meaning to my life, and let me press you to me in my thoughts and enfold in that embrace everything I feel for you!

Oh, could I only do this in reality, eye to eye, heart to heart, to pour out to you my heart that is so full of sadness. Stella, my Stella, I would so love to make you happy with a joyful letter, gladden you with the news that we are happy, that we have achieved our goal! Alas, instead, this letter will be one long complaint. I do not like to complain but the truth has to be told. An unexpected change has taken place in our affairs: the issue is now more complicated than ever, a speedy solution is urgent.

It is a question of standing or falling, of celebration or TOTAL ANNIHILATION and … our hands are tied. There is a duty, called gratitude, there is a high and holy duty called the love of a child, and there is a low, cursed evil, called egotism. Oh, sometimes it is so difficult to determine where the good ends and the evil begins. If things are to be taken to extremes, the dividing line between them is barely discernible. Father's health is such that serious emotional upset must be avoided. Do you know what this means? We are completely at the mercy of blind fate.

We had stood so close to the realization of our dearest wishes and now we are once more so far away from it and, moreover, something terrible hangs over our heads.[48] It is a bitter awakening from a sweet dream after having just removed all the obstacles. Oh, poor trembling heart, whose repeated cries of 'what is my duty?' in the midst of its deep suffering receives no answer, while those who should answer are groping around in utter darkness. Light! Light! My God! Stand by us! We do not know how and where this will end!

Oh, and no doubt just to comfort and cheer us up, we were informed that nothing will come of that fine plan of the Government to train the daughters of Regents as teachers since most of the Regents whose advice was sought declared themselves against the plan as it went against the adat which prohibits young girls from receiving instruction outside the home.[49] It is a hard blow. We had built all our hopes on this; adieu, now, my dreams, adieu golden dreams of the future! Truly, it was too beautiful to be true!

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48 This relates to the news that a marriage was being arranged for her sister Kardinah although this was not officially confirmed till November of that year.

49 The opposition to this idea by a majority of the regents consulted was cited by the government as the reason for rejecting Abendanon's plan.

Oh! Those Conservatives. If they only knew what they had repudiated, but what else could be expected from our stuffy land? But silence now, we should not be unfair in attacking those who cannot feel anything for the progressive plans of the government and the interests of their daughters. In order to appreciate something one first needs to understand it and how can these narrow-minded people understand the desires of our young modern generation, these people who still live in complete darkness, who have never thought differently. Where in enlightened Europe, the centre of civilization, the source of light, the struggle for justice is still being waged fiercely and furiously, can we expect that in the backward Indies, which has been in deep slumber for centuries, and which is still asleep, it would be accepted, even permitted, that the women, who for centuries had been regarded and treated as an inferior being, could be regarded as a person who is entitled to a freedom of conscience?

Oh, Stella, we were so utterly happy, so proud, when we learned it was the Government's intention to provide opportunities for the daughters of Regents to qualify as teachers. That our friends were behind this I do not need to tell you, of course. In this way, in fact, the opportunity would have been provided for all girls of our social class to gain an independent existence; a path would have been opened to freedom and happiness, and it was swept aside. And isn't it enough to make you scream? A free education was being offered and there are still those amongst us who cannot accept it. And I had already been basking in the idea of how your eyes would sparkle when you heard the wonderful news, and now everything is out the window.

How things stand now precisely I do not know – our friends in Batavia are on tour – but we think things are now in a wretched state. I hope that these priceless plans for the general education of Native girls will not go the same way as well, also because of the negative attitude of the parents. If so, nothing would be left. That would be terrible! Oh, you cannot know how my fingers are burning to write about the wonderful proposals of the Director of Education and about the proposed training of the daughters of Regents or teachers but I, miserable creature, must hold my tongue and my pen; I cannot express my opinion about these important subjects, particularly not in the press. Do you realize that even people in our immediate vicinity know nothing of what is fermenting and glowing within us? That nothing is known of our plans? I was so amused when a close acquaintance, who often visits us and had read about the proposed course for Regent's daughters in the newspaper, told the sisters that this was precisely something which would suit me, and that she and her husband would force me to take steps in that direction. Her husband spoke to

me about it later and I, with a deadpan face, as though I knew nothing about it, let him talk on.[50]

Both of them, husband and wife, support me and are completely in favour of the emancipation of the Native woman. He is a government official and is able to do a lot for us, his wife promised us her support in the coming days. Nice to see such enthusiasm, she is someone who would like to make herself useful but does not know how. Her husband will get a promotion and then they will both be in a position to do much more in helping to raise up our people. We put together a plan for how they could make themselves useful and she and her husband are interested. When he is Assistant Resident she will have the daughters of the Native officials working under him come to her home (they know only too well that given the emphasis almost all Natives place on status, parents will consider it frightfully prestigious to be a regular visitor at the home of the local administrator) to be instructed in needlework and cooking and perhaps also in reading and writing. It will be useful and rewarding work; the lady is overjoyed with the idea! We hope that this plan will be replicated by others.[51]

Isn't it wonderful! Of course I told her a lot about you and her admiration for you gave me so much pleasure. She would also like to become a member of the Onderlinge Vrouwen-Bescherming.[52] She has two daughters in Holland, one of whom wishes to become a lawyer and the other also wants to be trained in a profession. When I once let slip that I had a serious plan to spend at least half a year working in a hospital before I entered life, in whatever capacity, in order to get to know what I could about nursing so that I would not be at a loss when confronted by a patient, she immediately said that her brother-in-law, who is a doctor, would be willing to take me and instruct me in the secrets of nursing which would always come in use for me and for those in my surroundings. This doctor speaks no Javanese and only a little Malay; I could therefore be of service to him, by acting as interpreter in return since most of his patients are Natives or Chinese.

I am really thinking seriously of spending some time in a hospital – it has to form an aspect of my education; I had been thinking of it for some

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50 The reference is to the junior colonial official in Jepara, the controleur Quartero and his wife.

51 Significantly, this is the model for the classroom later established by Kartini. It also become apparent then that parents were motivated by the associated prestige.

52 The Vereeniging Onderlinge Vrouwen-Bescherming (Women's Mutual Protection Society) was established in 1897 with the aim of protecting unmarried mothers and their children.

time.[53] What do you think? Oh, it's terrible, and more than terrible to watch someone who is in extreme pain and not know how to lessen that pain; the spectator actually suffers more than the patient. I have sat by sickbeds since childhood and I know what I am talking about. It was while attending a sickbed that the idea came to me to undertake a course in nursing. At first the idea was quite vague but it quickly took firmer shape and now it has become an idée fixe. If later I am allowed to speak, that is, to say freely what is on my mind, and am talking about education of young girls I will plead for the value of knowledge of hygiene, knowledge of the human body etc. etc. for women. I would like to see this included in the curriculum for the schools for Native girls, which are to be established. Poor things, eh, who alongside all the other hodge-podge would also have to swallow that as well. What an ideal institution that boarding school for Native young ladies would be: the arts, academic subjects, cooking, domestic economy, needlework, hygiene and vocational training will and must be there.[54] Dream on, dream on! If it makes one happy, why not?

What I have written for publication till now is just nonsense, impressions of some event or another.[55] I am not allowed to refer to serious issues unfortunately. Later when we have completely wrestled free from the iron grip of centuries-old tradition (for us this exists only because of our love for our dear parents) it will be different. Father does not like to have the name of his daughter on everyone's lips. When I am completely independent I will be able to express my opinion. Until then, patience I guess. Stella, I will not send you nonsense. If I write anything that is very dear to me, because it reflects my inner convictions, I will send it to you.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

23 May 1901

My dearly beloved Friend.

Just a brief month lies between my last letter to you and this one. What must you have been thinking about your Jepara friends, not having had a sign

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53 Kartini's emphasis on Modjowarno in this letter appears to be an attempt to prepare Stella for the possibility that the plan to study in Europe would not eventuate.

54 Kartini emphasizes this in her later memorandum about education, 'Give the Javanese Education', of January 1903. A similar plea was expressed in the speech by her brother, Sosrokartono, delivered in Ghent in 1899.

55 Given Stella's serious involvement in feminist issues and organizations, Kartini apparently feels it necessary to dismiss these achievements. See Part Four.

from them? Perhaps you thought that they had all departed the land of the living but surely not that they had forgotten you however.

In our thoughts we were so often with you; yes, is there one day in which I do not think of my dear angel or speak of her with my sisters? In this way I sent you in my thoughts my warmest best wishes on the appointment of your son as mining engineer[56] – when I read this wonderful news in the paper, deeply deploring the circumstances that did not allow me to do in reality what I had done in spirit.

But now, somewhat belatedly, I still want to offer you my congratulations on the appointment of your 'dashing' boy. You must realize this is meant with all my heart. And how pleased we are – oh, how very happy for you – that you will see that dear boy again in a few days time! What a joy that will be! I can imagine that so clearly and understand it so well. I wish I could quickly take your hand – that would tell how pleased I am with and for you on the imminent homecoming of your second son. You will be busy during his first days at home, eh dear, kind, Moedertje? The little boy will not be able to be separated from his mother and vice versa! Goodness, what an affair that will be between mother and son.[57]

And now thank you, many thanks, for all the kind letters last month and earlier this month. Letter, postcard and greetings from Padang were all received safely. The newspapers again informed me that you have again returned to Batavia. How are you both, dearest? The last two times you wrote, both of you were not very well. How are you now, dearest? We hope that the trip has done both of you good. Was it a pleasant trip? A very interesting one, no doubt? When you write me again then please do not forget to tell me the state of health of you both.

The business of the carved boxes has ended – Dr Nieuwenhuis has his 'treasures' and the woodcarver has his.

In relation to the woodcarving, I had an amusing experience about which we all had a good laugh. From an unknown person in Buitenzorg I received a letter with a request to have a box made for this person similar to that made for Dr N., as well as for drawings and models of all sorts of carved boxes together with their prices. The poor man was under the misapprehension that I was conducting a woodcarving business or some such, at least that is what we assumed from his letter. It was suggested that I go along with it and maintain

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[56] EC (Edie) Abendanon was appointed engineer at the Ombilin Coal mines in West Sumatra.

[57] It is not clear whether Kartini realized Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri was the boy's stepmother.

the illusion – the sisters would do the drawings – an acquaintance offered to photograph the objects and I would write the most polite letter. The gentleman requested a prompt answer.

But now you would no doubt like to hear some details about us, would you not? With our Father everything is now fine, thank God. Father has returned to health and is improving daily – but the message is that he must take care. Father is not yet his former self – what he was. We certainly are being tried – the new century has not brought us much joy till now, only much anxiety and care. These two have followed hard on each other's heels of late. Scarcely had Father started to get better, and we could take a deep breath when a new worry commenced in the shape of our brother who, at the beginning of May, returned home from vacation from Semarang and after being home for a day became seriously ill.[58] We have gone through very anxious days. Now, thank God, we have lived through our suffering and in the last week our brother has been totally free of fever and has completely recovered. He has never been fat but then he certainly did remind me too much of the starving people of British India. The other brother who is the local jaksa here has also been very ill.[59]

We were planning to go to Semarang this morning but Father received a telegram from uncle in Demak[60] asking whether we could receive him and his ill daughters today. Naturally there is now no longer any talk of our trip – it is remarkable how often in recent months we have had to act as nurse. I totally lost my senses when Father was so ill, which no doubt you will have noticed from the confused and desperate letter which I wrote to you in those days but I am now slowly returning to normal.

Oh, how life can sometimes weigh heavily upon us! How again we have suffered terribly in the preceding week from many things. Could I only look for a moment in those clear, kind eyes, feel my hand warmly enclosed in yours, I would face this difficult life, comforted and strengthened. We cannot thank God sufficiently that the three of us are together and of one heart, one soul: how could we otherwise have come through this difficult time? Stand together, fall together, loyal sisters! And as well, whatever the circumstances may be, your love and your understanding! Many thanks, my good angel! You again meant so much to us in these last weeks! Let me not speak of 'business' today – forgive me if I disappoint you in this – but I cannot do so now; I am not in the mood to write about it. If it is at all possible I shall write to you

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58 This refers to Kartini's younger brother, Moelijono, who was attending the HBS in Semarang.

59 This refers to Kartini's older brother, Boesono.

60 The Regent of Demak, Hadiningrat.

again soon but do not count on it too much – the written pages following on from that portion of a letter I sent you in March still lie before me, I cannot send them to you now – perhaps later, if I regain that mood in which they were written.

This afternoon we went with Mevr. Gonggrijp[61] to the beach and bathed in the sea. The sea was beautifully calm and uniform in colour. I sat on a rock with my feet in the water, gazing towards the horizon. Oh, how wonderfully beautiful our earth is. Joy, gratitude and peace filled my heart! Mother Nature has never left us uncomforted when we came to her for support. I thought so much of you when I sat there in pure enjoyment and on coming home I immediately sat down to write – you had to hear something from us if only just a few words.

Goodbye my dear beloved, everyone here greets you heartily and the threesome embraces you warmly, of whom one is your own.

Kartini

Mevr. Gonggrijp is a friend of your sister-in-law Mevr. Cohen-Stuart. She visited her in Leiden when she was in Holl. last year. Mevr. G. is a lovable woman and an exemplary mother of five wonderful children.

To Hilda de Booij-Boissevain

6 June 1901

Dear Hilda

Let me begin by congratulating you both, also on behalf of the sisters, with the birth of your second son, hoping that he will become just as healthy a little fellow as his older brother so that in time he might grow into a fine boy that you both can be rightly proud of. How does our little friend respond to his new position as 'oldest brother'? [62] Does he already want to play with little Alfred – that's what the little one is called, isn't he?

A May child! De Genestet[63] has such a beautiful poem about this. The ending is tragic but for your May child we fervently hope that the prayers of the poet in the two last couplets of part one may be fulfilled. Although you

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61 The reference is to the wife of the local assistant resident. She and her husband were present at both Kartini's wedding and funeral.

62 Kartini had met the older infant, Tom(my), during her visit to Batavia. Hilda wrote to her mother that Kartini had given the infant a lot of attention during the visit.

63 PA de Genestet (1829–1861) was a popular Dutch poet.

undoubtedly know those lines yourself I can't help writing them down again here:

May the God of springtime spread
Roses at your feet;
May the God of Love keep
You gentle, loyal and good.

Blossom under your father's care
Blossom at your mother's side
To them the most beautiful flower on earth
You: the little fellow of May.

I hear you laugh as you are reading this page. How silly eh? But don't be surprised at it, all old aunties are more or less sentimental by nature and the undersigned belongs in that category.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

6 June 1901

My own dearest Mevrouwtje, I have just come to hear how things are with you two. I have heard nothing from you for so long and I am quite concerned that perhaps one or the other unwelcome guest, I mean illness, is enjoying your hospitality. I hope sincerely that my fears are groundless but that it is, amongst other things, the arrival of the long awaited son that is keeping you silent. Oh please dearest, send me just a single line by postcard, and tell me how you are – I long so very, very much for some news from my soulmate Moedertje.

What terrible news I read in the paper that cholera has broken out in Batavia! I seriously hope that that uninvited guest will quickly show its heels and go somewhere where it can do less evil.

Here at home it is still so-so. Brother has again been ill for a whole week but is now, thank God, improving but now the youngest brother has fallen ill.[64] The cousins returned home again the day before yesterday. They were not as ill as we had first thought – they already had had the worst of their illness. But last week my oldest sister came over with her children. We were

[64] The youngest brother, Sosrorawito, was then nine years old.

shocked by her appearance – poor thing, she looked properly worn out – which is no wonder because she also has had a serious bout of malaria. She will stay here for at least a month, we will not let her leave any earlier. That dear soul must first fully regain her strength.[65]

I will come to you again soon – on paper – now I take my leave.

Goodbye dearest Mevrouw! Warm greetings from us all – in my thoughts I hold your hand.

Your own
Kartini

Professor G. K. Anton

10 June 1901

We know that beautiful work by Borel about gamelan (soul music the writer calls it) and we have it here.[66] Do you know the other things he has written?[67] Such as *Het Jongetje*, which is absolutely wonderful. Many people think Borel is overly sentimental but we take much pleasure in his many books. *De Laatste Incarnatie*[68] is very fine, and particularly good is *Droom uit Tosari*[69], in which he describes in a uniquely beautiful way the marvellous natural beauty of Java's blue mountains. We so appreciated this! One would have to be an artist, or at least be blessed with a good helping of artistic feeling to be able to <u>see</u> and <u>appreciate</u> the beauty of Mother Nature in that way and to be able to represent all that in such pure language one would really have to be one of the chosen ones upon whose forehead the muse has planted a kiss.

I hope one day to have the opportunity to learn your beautiful sweet-sounding language. I would not neglect to make use of such an opportunity, I can assure you. I am quite serious in wanting to learn your language one day; even if that were limited to reading and writing I would be happy. And should

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65 Kartini's relationship with her older sister had dramatically improved. See Kartini's account of the relationship between siblings in an initial letter to Stella, 18 August 1899.

66 Henri Borel (1869–1933). The reference is perhaps to an essay in *Opstellen* published in 1900.

67 Kartini here flaunts her familiarity with this popular writer and former colonial adviser on Chinese affairs. *Het Jongetje*, his most popular work, was published in 1898. As well as novels he wrote on Chinese culture and philosophy, and colonial issues.

68 *De Laatste Incarnatie* (The Last Incarnation) concerns observations on Japanese culture published in 1900.

69 *Droom uit Tosari* (Dream from Tosari) concerns observations during a stay in the central Javanese mountain resort, Tosari, published in 1899.

I be so fortunate to get as far as being able to speak German, then I will come to visit you, all right? In the meantime, the flying machine will no doubt have been invented and one fine day you would see a large object flying across the sky above Jena that would be bringing your guest from afar!!!

I should have been born a boy – then some of my high-flying plans might see the light of day. Now, the way Native society is today as a girl it is almost impossible, it will be a devil of a job to realize even one of them. But how could it be otherwise. Where even in Europe, centre of civilization and enlightenment, a fierce battle is still being fought for the rights of women, could one seriously expect that in the Indies – that uncivilized, unenlightened, dozing Indies – where the woman has been regarded down the centuries as a lesser being, (I won't say why that is) and regarded and treated as a soulless object; that it would be permitted that its daughters would be treated as a person, that is, an individual that has a right to an independent conscience, to freedom of thought, feeling and action?

For me it was as if the door of heaven had sprung open and as if my delighted eyes had caught sight of an endless wonderland stretching behind it when, some time ago, I read the memorable news that the government had the intention to provide the daughters of Native officials with an opportunity to train as teachers. I am sure I don't need to tell you who had made this possible. I did not write to Mevrouw Abendanon about this; we know that our noble friend of the people, Heer Abendanon, was the initiator of this proposal. It was such a blessing for us that we have been able to meet and have found these noble souls. I therefore regard it as the most blessed day of my life, that the luckiest, the absolutely luckiest stars steered the idealistic, noble family in our direction.

We were half crazy with joy about this news in the papers. It was a big step forward and the proverb is so true: 'It is the first step that counts.' Oh, as long as those upon whom this boon is conferred will be able to appreciate it! In order to appreciate it one first needs to be able to understand it; but to understand, oh, that is a difficult art that cannot be learnt in one day, not in one year! How can the vast majority of the Native officials for whom the principles underpinning the direction that we, the young generation, uphold remains a riddle and a mystery, appreciate the government's plans for the welfare and advancement of their daughters?

Alas, our fears seem to be well grounded. Nothing is likely to come of the wonderful government plan for which we had such expectations – nothing – since most of the Native officials whose advice was sought declared themselves against the idea since it was against the adat for young girls to receive education

outside the home. Adieu illusions, adieu golden dreams for the future! Oh, I have already told myself so often, expressed it out loud, that dreams and ideals are an unnecessary ballast in our Native society, an unnecessary and dangerous luxury! But that is what the mouth says, inspired by the cold, unemotional intellect. The heart – that stupid silly thing – cannot let it go. Dreams of emancipation and other ideals are so deeply rooted within us, they can no longer be uprooted without entirely destroying the soil in which they are thriving.

I think it is very sweet of you to be concerned about my future. I am very grateful. But, oh, don't be sad about me, or rather, about what awaits us. We three will go hand in hand through life that will be full of struggle and disappointments and sorrow for us. The path we have chosen is certainly not strewn with roses: rather it is full of thorns. But we have chosen it ourselves, out of love, and we shall walk it cheerfully and with love. We will help construct the road that will lead thousands and thousands of poor, oppressed and downtrodden souls, our sisters, towards freedom and happiness; that will inevitably bring millions of my compatriots to a higher spiritual level of development. And in this way to labour on the eternal task of achieving perfection. That is a gigantic task that down through the centuries the best amongst humanity have contributed, to raise up mankind to a higher spiritual level, in short to bring our beautiful world closer to perfection. Is such a task as this not worth the struggle of a lifetime?

This is the dream of the 'Tiga Saudara', the three Javanese sisters in that far-off land of the Sun. Oh, could we only go to the land of changing seasons, the land of warmth and cold, the fatherland of the sciences, to prepare ourselves there for the great struggle that we want to embark upon for the sake of the future welfare and happiness of our people. Study! Study! Gain wisdom in Europe! Fill our souls with beauty in order to return to our own land to work on realizing our ideals! One needs use of one's intelligence in anything one does but especially in doing good. That cannot be denied, even though it is often asserted that doing good and acting intelligently are two opposing impulses, are two contradictory drives which all human beings feel within them and endeavour to temper, to mix, to harmonize, to get to work together! Oh, I have seen so often that doing good without the addition of intelligence does more harm than good.

Europe! Europe! Will you then be forever unreachable for us, we who with heart and soul long for you? We cannot, we will not believe it – and yet it is so. A journey to and staying in Europe is so expensive. That is a luxury that our minister of finances cannot afford.

But this is not something to despair about. Life is too beautiful, too wonderful to spend it moping about things that ultimately cannot be changed. Let us be thankful – and we are – for the many blessings that God has showered upon us. Are we not, with all that we have and are, already privileged above thousands and thousands of others? Having our dear, good parents, good health and the many other advantages that make up our beautiful lives? Life is full of beauty, if only we can see it despite all the bitterly tragic aspects that exist and it is our duty to add to what is beautiful and to make what is sorrowful, less so.

There is so much to be thankful for! If we take pleasure is the song of the birds, or beautiful music in which we become totally absorbed, then we are thankful that God did not create us deaf! When we are on Klein Scheveningen, the idyllic spot by the sea, where everything breathes peace and quiet and poetry, and where the sun sets so beautifully, then we can't be more grateful that we have good eyes and in our delighted eyes, which in silent enjoyment follow the play of light and colour on the waves and in the heavens there lies a silent prayer to the Omniscient Great Spirit who has created and directs the Universe!

Thank you! Thank you sings my jubilant beating heart inside me. Thank you that I may and am able to see this beauty. How many people are there who cannot enjoy it? Not only the poor things for whom days and nights are the same, a continual total darkness but also those many who are in complete possession of their sight and yet are unable to see this beauty. And so we come to the realization of how privileged we are above so many of our fellow men and our soul is filled with gratitude for the blessings of the Good God! It is a melancholy thought that many of us must remind ourselves of what others lack in order to recognize the privileges that we have.

There are more cultivated Native women, much more educated and skilled than I who have everything at their disposal; who did not lack any opportunity to richly feed their intellect with knowledge; who were in no way limited in their development; who could have become anything they wanted. They all did nothing, achieved nothing that might have led to the improvement of the position of their sex and of their people. They just fell back into the old ways, or became totally absorbed into European culture. In both cases they were lost to their people for whom they ought to have been a blessing had they wanted to be; who should have been leading the way to the enlightened world which their free upbringing had brought them to. Is it not the duty of anyone who is morally and intellectually superior to the majority, to support and guide his inferiors with his superior knowledge and wisdom? No actual law obligates him to do so but morally he is obliged to do so.

Oh, how I have been carrying on, forgive me if I have unsettled or bored you. What came over me to write all this and to rob you of so much time with this chatter. Forgive me! But you yourself are not totally free from blame for this: your letters that are lying before me are so nice. Reading those hearty words it feels as though you are both here with me, and I constantly had this thought while I was writing.

No doubt you have heard from others that there is a volcano in the Oosthoek[70] that has erupted and taken the lives of a number of people, so I won't write to you about that. According to the paper there are apparently several other volcanoes that are now active as well. Oh, you treacherous beautiful, blue mountains!

The sun eclipse of 18 May[71] for which scientists from all over the world came to the Indies we only saw here for a moment because unfortunately it just happened that it was a day of heavy clouds and on top of that it rained! But what caused me to utter a cry of regret was a blessing for the man on the land. Father was so happy with the heavy rain that was good for the thirsty fields and so much depends on them. Just think how much can depend on a single rainstorm. The weal and woe of hundreds, yes, thousands!

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 June 1901

Dearest Mevrouw,

Hooray! A letter from my 'Kalong'[72] – I have been so looking forward to it! I am so happy with it! Therefore I have quickly put pen to paper to send my dear angel my deepest thanks.

We took great pleasure in your joy at the arrival of your sister and young son but we were also really able to share your sadness when you received that telegram from your sister and you had to imagine the terrible situation your sister faced when, arriving from so far away, and for such sad reasons to this strange land, she found not one of those whom she had contacted and there was not one face she knew to welcome her! That was hard – oh, my dearest how sorry we are for you! We hope with all our heart that your sister's stay in

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70 'Oosthoek' (eastern corner) is a reference to the northeast region of Java.

71 The total eclipse of the sun on 18 May 1901 was widely reported. The Dutch solar team which recorded the eclipse in Borneo included Dr Nieuwenhuis as photographer (http://www.exploratorium.edu/eclipse/1901.html).

72 Kalong (keluang), fruit bat, was her nickname for the Abendanons.

the Indies will be pleasant, and that in the midst of her family the memories of anxious and sad days in your country will diminish.

With what a wonderful sense of joy you wrote about Didi being at home! – it is a shout of joy which we really savoured. There is one more extremely happy family on earth. We sincerely hope that this great joy may last a little longer for you and that the fortunate mother may have her son at home with her for a while yet.

Thank you for your kind interest – Father has now much improved and if he does not tire himself out one can hardly notice that he has been so ill. The brothers are staying up in the mountains and are feeling fine – we visited them yesterday, the cool mountain climate is doing them a lot of good. Towards the end of the month they will return home. Poor Moelijono, to have had 2 months of vacation and not to have been able to benefit from it.

Sister Kardinah is also looking pert, as is Roekmini and this old fellow, who imagined that she had become a little thinner, is now plumper than ever.

We have not said a word here about 'business' for a long time to our poor Father. Even if the doctor had said nothing, we ourselves would have realized that emotion of whatever kind had to be avoided. Do you know what that means: we are defenceless and delivered into the mercy of Fate! There is a high duty named gratitude, there is a high, holy duty that is called filial piety, and there is an evil, horrible and deeply detestable: its name is egotism! Oh, in some situations it is so difficult to discern where the good ends and the evil begins. But I know now that I stand within the second because I am well on the way to spoiling your beautiful pleasure in the arrival of your loved ones with sombre thoughts. So not another word about it, old fellow, if you are serious in striving for the good and to do what is good at all times.

Yesterday afternoon we were in our garden again for the first time in a long while. Oh, our poor flower children! How we have neglected them – 3 whole months almost we have not paid them any attention!

But now I must end, dearest; after 30 June I will be able to write more – at the moment we are living here in terrible disorder.

Goodbye, heartiest greetings from all of us to you both, a warm hand and hearty kiss from your own

Trio

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

July 1901

Dearest Mevrouw,

Because of the great rush we have not been able to read the papers for days, but this morning, finally sitting in front of a pile of newspapers, I pulled out one by chance – quickly perusing the telegraphic reports – to see what was happening in the big world – and oh, how my eyes sparkled when, amongst the items that left me more or less indifferent, I read the wonderful news: the appointment of your son to Batavia! My first thought was: 'How heavenly that will be for her', and my second: 'I shall write to her immediately to offer her my best wishes, to tell her how wonderful for her we also think it is' – we, because the sisters who quickly came to see, were just as pleased about it as I. Delicious, eh Moedertje dearest, to have your son remain a while longer in your immediate vicinity? We can so easily imagine how happy you must be about this! And oh, what further wonderful news did that same newspaper which informed us of your son's appointment bring: the success of your youngest in the Pol[itical] School exams.[73] Our heartiest congratulations on this dearest, and to Mijnheer! What wonderful times you are experiencing! But if there is anyone on earth who already deserves heaven then it is my angel!

All these good tidings make us so happy, so excited, as though they concerned our own family. Oh, we so much want to know that a certain dearly loved face beams with happiness, that a certain, dear pair of eyes shine moistly with gratitude! How we would love to be able to peek round the corner to see a happy mother busily attending to her son, to make that prince comfortable – oh, enviable people! – and to see in reality the picture we see so often in our imagination, mother and son so happy in each other's company, sitting very close together, she, with eyes full of pride and love directed at him – and he pleased and happy, looking at her with a glance that says: 'Oh dear mother, how happy I am to be with you again!'

There is the old dreamer again, but, in a time in which prosaic, cold, unfeeling reality constitutes the main course, if not the total menu, of life's sustenance, is that not all right, dearest? Oh, poor fools, who will not learn despite repeated contact in recent times with cold disillusioning reality!

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[73] Abendanon's youngest son, Geldolph (b. 1880) was preparing to enter the training school for prospective colonial civil servants, presumably at Leiden – the other son was studying at Delft. The training of colonial officials had been considerably reformed at the end of the century with an expanded curriculum and stricter entry examinations.

But how are you all? And your sister, how is she? Is she enjoying it in the Indies – the climate and life style in our sunny land? Is she now learning Dutch and Malay? What a lot of questions, one after the other!

We received some photographs from our friend Dr Adriani yesterday, one of Dr A. himself and one of his wife and her mother we think – there was no letter with it. And we have just seen a photo of a friend of you both: Dr Snouck Hurgronje.[74] You have no doubt also read that clever piece by Abdul Rivai in *Oost en West*?[75] What did you think of it? My heart beat loudly when I read that article and saw that it came from someone of my race. Hooray for Abdul Rivai, that fine energetic Malay![76]

A moment ago I was called away. Oh imagine! I have just heard some terrible news: the craftsman who carves wood so beautifully and had made all those large pieces of ours, has died. Such a young man and ill for barely 4 days. Oh, that exasperating indifference of my countrymen – here is another victim of it. He had had a fever – malaria with diarrhoea – and they had just left him to die there, no medicines or such were given. We had no idea he was ill and we must have told those people 1000 x to warn us if there were any problems – and to ask us for obat but they would not do it. From what: complacency – and indifference! He was a nice neat man – we liked him very much. With him the best artist in the field of Jepara woodcarving has gone to the grave. There were only two able to do it so beautifully (woodcarving) – one, especially for large objects – that was this poor man – and one for smaller items like small boxes, frames, etc., etc. I am so upset by these terrible tidings that I cannot possibly make this letter longer.

Goodbye dearest Mevrouw. Accept our kindest greetings to you both, in our thoughts you are embraced warmly by

Your
Kartini

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74 Snouck Hurgronje, Colonial Adviser on Native and Islamic Affairs, was prominent at the time in advocating reform of the colonial administration and the expansion of Western education for the Javanese elite.

75 Abdul Rivai (b. 1871), graduate of the 'doctor-jawa' school, came to the Netherlands in 1899 for further studies, and contributed key articles to *Oost en West* and other papers arguing for education and the advancement of Indonesians along similar lines to Kartini and her brother, Kartono. He was key founder of the first Dutch language papers devoted to Indonesian interests, *Bandara Wolanda* (1900) and later *Bintang Hindia* (1902).

76 Kartini pointedly refers to Rivai, a Sumatran, as a 'Malay,' in distinction to her ethnicity as Javanese. Kartini's sense of a common future for all inhabitants of the archipelago remains ambiguous.

To Mijnheer De Booij

12 July 1901[77]

First may I heartily thank you for the photo of Tom with which we were very happy. We are overjoyed with it! We have rarely seen such a dear little thing! Tommy has once again stolen the hearts of his Javanese girl friends! And how finely the photograph has been produced – one would say this is the work of a photographer, not of an amateur.

We are pleased to learn that your dear wife is well – we heartily hope that Hilda will quickly return to full strength!

I am more than happy to order the box to be made for your brother and afterwards arrange to have it sent to Surabaya. Both of you should feel free to come to me for help at any time, if we can help you with anything. You should never be afraid that this will be too much or too difficult for us. In fact we would take it amiss of you if you did not tell us when there was something we could have done for you.

And now, to come back to the box you have ordered. As soon as I received your request I sent to the carpenter[78] to give him the order. He accepted it and promised me to deliver the job in time. You described the box clearly so you do not need to fear that this would be misunderstood. Shortly before I received your letter the carpenter brought me a well-made box made of two types of wood. I thought if the carpenter might not accept your order I could suggest to your brother to take this one instead of the one he had ordered. Its dimensions are as follows: length 88 cm, width 33 cm, total height (that is to say, from the bottom of the box and excluding the legs) 13 cm, the lid 5 cm and the legs 2 cm. The lid is made of light brown ambalo wood, contained in a frame of black sono wood.

The top is carved with wayang figures and the sides with two dear, small birds, leaves, flowers and vines. I believe that, especially in Holland, this box with its wayang figures will be unique.

I also asked the carpenter, therefore, to carve wayang figures on the box you ordered but could see for myself that this object really did not lend itself to this. The lid is too small. The figures would have to be quite small and would also need first to be drawn and this is no easy task. That would therefore take time, which we don't have. The box that I mentioned above can be locked with a key. They are now also making a box of two types of wood which will have

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77 This letter was included in an appendix of the 1976 Dutch edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Allard 1976, pp. 412–414).

78 In this letter Kartini uses the term 'timmerman' – the Dutch term for carpenter – rather than as elsewhere, 'houtsnijder', woodcarver.

a complete wayang scene carved on it – on the lid, on the outside and inside, and on each side there are wayang figures. They have been working on it for a month now and are still not finished. But they must not rush it; they must work carefully because it has to be very beautiful. The question of the carving has become a big issue – but enough about that now!

How nice that the little one also looks like Tom. What will he be called? His little mother said he would be Alfred.[79]

Yes the Javanese language is a beautiful and rich and – a difficult one! Some time ago we had here a High Javanese club. It consisted of several employees from a neighbouring sugar enterprise and us three. Only high Javanese was spoken as best they could and whoever spoke a word of Dutch had to pay a fine of a quarter. It was great fun and I probably don't need to tell you that a great many debts had to be paid but in the meantime they learned our language properly.

We have here a 3 year old cousin – he speaks high, middle and low Javanese. What amazes us is that he rarely makes mistakes and knows exactly who he needs to address in high, middle or low Javanese. A nice little thing, he had learned this when he was only 2.

We admired Tom's masterpiece. How sweet that that little fellow can already draw – he might yet become a great artist!

I respectfully ask you to give our regards to your wife and Tom and also to yourself

Yours sincerely
Kartini.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

1 Aug 1901

Yes, my dearest Mevrouw, of course I will buy the stag head for Mijnheer, with great pleasure! You know, do you not, that you can always ask me to do anything – if it is something you want from our locality or something else, that it is a pleasure for me to be allowed to do something for my dear angel. But to be able to purchase this stag head I need first to know what kinds of heads the Resident was thinking of when he asked Mijnheer. I know nothing about recently prepared stag heads to which the Resident referred. Also Heer

[79] The English names of Hilda's children, Tom (Thomas) and Alfred, reflected her British ancestry through her mother.

Gonggrijp, our Ass. Resident to whom I mentioned it, knows nothing about it. Probably the Resident meant the fine stag head Heer G. has which His Honour saw in May this year when he was here.

But these stag heads are not for sale, they are only obtained on order and then one still has to provide the antlers and the wood – this latter needs to be solid and of a good size – since the head is very large, consisting of head and neck, all in one piece, apart from the ears which are made separately and inserted. All this is no problem, good wood although not easy to get, is obtainable here, also the antlers, but what I would find irritating for you is that you would have to exercise such patience if you ordered such a stag head, since mister carpenter, the only one unfortunately who carves heads, is rather lazy by nature and works irritatingly slowly. He normally takes a month to do a head. One head comes to about *f*11 – antlers *f*1, wood *f*3, and labour *f*7. Should I order one like this for Mijnheer, which is really the best of this type available here? Pa has just told me that he knows of a wonderful set of antlers available for purchase – I may as well go ahead and have this purchased – should you not want it then we can use it ourselves, we also like it. So, now I have told you everything that I know about stag heads. I will of course not order the head until I have received an answer from you.

How are you dearest? We hope with all our heart that you are feeling like us, because then all is well. Oh, you do not know with how much pleasure – and with what feelings of gratitude – I write this: 'Here we are all well.' I feel so happy, so free and as pleased as a bird in the blue sky now that we are finally without sick ones in the house.

> Finally the palm tree blooms.
> Finally the alu flowers.
> Finally – finally comes at last!

sang the Dutch poet. 'Finally comes at last!'[80] It echoes as a comfort and encouragement in my ears.

A very nice letter from your son has arrived safely. In reading it, it was as though we were hearing an old acquaintance speaking to us. It is hard for us to imagine that we hear his inner voice now for the first time – that we do not know your son personally. But his mother has told us so little about him! Oh, but what a fuss he makes of a simple welcome greeting. Tell him, dearest, that we are most grateful for his interest in our endeavours and that we enjoyed his

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[80] This is probably a poem by De Genestet.

hearty and sympathetic words and also that we are very pleased with the photo of you all that he sent us.

1 Aug – the birthday of my dear, kind, my beloved friend! Our very best wishes, dearest! A world of love this threesome wishes you and in our thoughts the sisters hold you in a warm embrace – expressing in that embrace everything – that they feel for you.

Will you pass onto Mijnheer our heartiest congratulations on the birthday of his wife? As a small token we send you a home-made sarong. Wear it close to you with the love of your Javanese friends. I had so very much wanted to batik the sarong myself but due to that terrible period of sickness I had to give up the idea and, however reluctantly, had to leave the task to others. It has also not turned out as fine as we had intended but do not pay attention to that and simply think of the good intentions. We were tremendously anxious that it would not be ready in time. At the moment when the wax had to be taken off the sarong, work had to be stopped – our brother, who you also know, suddenly became ill and we had to go to him. Now fortunately he has recovered and the sarong is on its way to our beloved friend! It was finished and quickly sewn and immediately sent.

Perhaps you will not like the perfume that it has and may not be able to put up with it. In that case forgive me that I gave the sarong that perfume – coming from a real Native environment we wanted it to be authentically Javanese and flowers and incense are indispensible for us Javanese with everything.

Oh, what a world of thoughts and images those Native flowers and the smell of dupa[81] calls up in me each time I breathe it in and continues to return to my memory many days after. It makes me feel powerfully the Javanese blood that fills my veins. Oh, soul of my people – which was once so beautiful – all gracefulness, poetry, humility and modesty – what has become of you? [82] What have the centuries, the routine, made of you?

It is so often claimed that we are more European than Javanese in our hearts – such a melancholy thought! Well, we may have been and are being completely permeated by European ideas and feelings but that blood, that Javanese blood, that lives and flows warmly through our veins, cannot be silenced. We can feel it with the smell of the incense, and the perfume of the flowers, with the sounds of the gamelan, with the rustling of the wind in the crowns of the

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81 Dupa, a generic term for incense often used for ceremonial occasions.

82 Kartini here reflects the rather sentimental appreciation expressed by writers such as Henri Borel but transforms it here into a motivation for working to revive the status of Javanese culture and this whole section is a powerful expression of her Javanese cultural nationalism.

coconut palms, with the cooing of the turtledoves, with the whistling of the wind through the padi, or the sound of the pounding of the rice on the block…

Not for nothing have we spent a lifetime in surroundings that are held together merely by conventions – but we have come to know the emptiness of such forms. We have felt deeply, deeply, their lack of content, have heard and understood that complaint, that cry of desperation of our soul: 'What is form without content?' Form must satisfy, but content is primary.

Yet there is much good in the Javanese people. Oh, how we would love to have you with us to show you everything that is beautiful belonging to our people. When I see something beautiful that is uniquely Javanese I always think: 'How I would like to have Mevr. A. with me. She would like it, to see all of this, and have someone by her, who could explain something or other that may be a puzzle and mystery to her. She would take great pleasure in what we admired and appreciate it, she who has such an eye and feeling for everything which is beautiful!'

Our little Javanese woodcarver, the artist as you call him, has again produced something very beautiful. It is a box with a complete wayang story carved on it. There are wayang figures on the lid on top and underneath, and on all four sides. It comes with a holder, also decorated with wayang figures and is intended to keep documents in it. I am going to pad and pleat the inside with orange satin, set off with a silver edge – also of Native manufacture. And it needs to be beautiful because it is intended to contain the portraits of the Regents of Java and Madura that will be presented to the Queen. This tribute is a nice idea – it originated from the person who ordered the box, the Regent of Garut. I have been given free rein, I can spend as much as I like on the two objects, as long as they turn out beautifully.

How I would love to be rich to spoil you deliciously with all those beautiful things! That box with its wayang figures would be something for you.

We felt so miserable when, the month before last, we were up to our ears in activity, when for days we had so many people in the house and the house was full, so full of lodgers that we even had to give up our room to our great distress. We think it is so terrible to have strange, indifferent people in our room. It is something akin to sacrilege when people we do not like enter our sacred place, see all those intimate corners and places where we so like to be – and then to take in with cold critical glances all those objects that are so dear to us. We think it is horrible. When there were so many people walking in and out of our room we locked everything up that was personally dear to us. Perhaps it was childish and in poor spirit, but we cannot stand it that they, even if only with their glances, not even with their hands, touch our treasures. At that time we felt particularly

miserable – no time to write – to read – neither place nor time for an intimate discussion amongst the three of us – everywhere strange eyes watched us.[83]

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

8–9 August 1901

Dearest Mevrouw,

With great sadness I noticed from our last letter how thoroughly exhausted you were and suddenly a strange urge arose in me to cheer you up. I seem to have lost the art of idle chatter. I was sitting thinking to myself how, in what way, I could make you happy. Then a happy or unfortunate idea came to me – the result will have to prove which – to give you a good laugh. And forgive me, I committed a crime, I committed a robbery: I took a diary from an old chap and copied out several pages that I am now sending you. Forgive me this misdemeanour – I sinned for you – for your sake. So long as it now does not have the opposite effect, that these pages instead of cheering you up make you even more ill. But the ill effect can be easily avoided – as soon as it bores you, just throw it into the fire.[84]

How are you all? I sincerely hope you are well. Here with us everyone is well. The stag's head has been ordered – you can send the money now. I still have *f*0:80 of yours from the previous assignment.

Bye! Have a good laugh at the sentimental old chap – that will definitely be very good for you! The heartiest greetings from us all and a kiss from

Your own foolish girl,
K.

Dr Nicolaus Adriani

10 August 1901

Highly Esteemed Doctor Adriani

Forgive me that I only now reply to your mail that brought me photos of you both which we were so happy about and so much appreciated and for which we thank you very much. That we have waited so long to reply is due

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83 This letter is incomplete.

84 In a later letter (21 August), apparently referring to the same piece of writing, Kartini mentions she only sent it two days previously. The item in question, which she titled 'Several Brief Hours in a Young Girl's Life: Sentimental Memories of an Old Maid' has been included in Part Two below.

firstly to the fact that I thought and hoped that after the photos we might also receive a letter from you and I am sure that such a letter was sent to me but that unfortunately it has gone the way of so many other letters that have never reached their destination. Am I right? Then all kinds of activities intervened and writing was postponed from one day to the other. I regret it very much not to have written immediately after receiving the photographs to thank you for your beautiful present, so that I would not have had to be guilty for this neglect. I therefore ask you both humbly for forgiveness.

That lady in black in the photograph is no doubt your wife? And that other person, a sister or friend? We think both of them have such kind faces.

So much came to mind when I saw your portraits. That happy evening at Kebon Sirih where we were so happy, where we could breathe in an environment of minds that was able to refresh, uplift and that did such good. So often, when I feel depressed, saddened by seeing so much misery which I am powerless to do anything about, so much injustice, so much uncharitableness, then I take comfort in thinking about our friend far away – we can refer to you in this way can't we? – who out of love of humanity has exiled himself from his own world to locate himself in a wilderness amongst 'wild' people to give them the love, to teach them the love he feels so strongly in his own bosom. And that is why we are delighted to have your photos. Looking at them makes it even easier to recall these wonderful souls for whom we feel such warm admiration, respect and attachment.

How are you both? I sincerely hope that it is like with us, in which case all will be well. I am particularly grateful for this because here everywhere it is so unhealthy. There is not a place where one does not hear talk of the widespread existence of one or other illness. In our region, Semarang, cholera has even broken out which has already taken so many victims in Batavia and Surabaya. Fortunately the illness only occurs sporadically in Semarang but it appears it is of a particularly severe variety and almost no sufferers have been able to be saved.[85] Besides cholera there is also dengue fever as well as another ailment that in several places on Java causes a great deal of misery amongst the population: food shortages. God protect our country from the worst catastrophe that can threaten our country: starvation. It is almost unbelievable that in Java, the fertile Java where everything, as it were, just shoots up out of the ground, there could be food shortage. And yet it is so, alas!

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[85] Semarang experienced repeated cholera epidemics at the turn of the century causing very high rates of mortality. In 1901 over 2000 people died in the residency.

The situation in Purwodadi is apparently particularly bad but just recently I read to my great joy that the government was making available about 3½ thousand guilders to purchase plough animals for Purwodadi and Demak. That region where my uncle is the regent is very unfortunate. Every year the people here await the West monsoon that always drowns the area, with fear and trepidation. I don't know how many thousands the Government has already spent on waterworks there but every West monsoon there is still flooding[86]. But, however wretched it can be here we are always more fortunate than our less well-off brothers and sisters in far-off Europe who, alongside hunger, also have to suffer the cold of winter.

I have here a book by Fielding that has just been sent to me from Holland. It deals with Buddhism and according to the reviews that I have read, is a very fine book.[87] It was translated from English by Felix Ortt, editor of *Waarheid en Vrede*.[88] You will no doubt know him by name. This is the idealist who propagates his beautiful ideal 'overcome evil with love'. A very beautiful theory but very difficult to put into practice but it very much appeals to us. We have also read his *Naar de groote Licht*[89] which deals with all the burning issues of the present day.

It will soon be a year ago that we met you in Depok. At that time we had no idea what a very pleasant acquaintance we would be making. I can still see you standing beside the train asking 'has the Regent of Jepara also come with you?' I can't understand that it can already be a year ago; for me it is as if it was yesterday. How time flies.

I just received a letter from Mevrouw A[bendanon] which said that those two were not too well. Mijnheer especially has not been well recently but nevertheless works on without a break. Do you know already that their second son, the mining engineer, after having made a wonderful long tour of Europe, has come out here – has been appointed to Batavia. His dear lovely mother is so happy with this. And then Mevrouw also has her sister over from Barcelona who of course doesn't know a word of Dutch or Malay so that her

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86 The colonial response to these conditions were later severely criticized by Dutch parliamentarian Henri van Kol during his 1901–1902 fact-finding tour of the Indies and reported in his *Uit Onze Koloniën* (1903).

87 Harold Fielding (1859–1917) *Soul of a People* (1898). It was a popular account of Buddhism in Burma

88 Felix Ortt (1866–1959) was recognized as a prominent advocate of vegetarianism and a leading Christian anarchist. His book, *Het Spiritisme* (Spiritualism) (1900), was highly influential in 'modern' circles. The periodical *Waarheid en Vrede* – full title: *Stemmen voor Waarheid en Vrede* (Voices for Truth and Peace) – was a Dutch journal produced for Protestant church members.

89 Harold Fielding, *The Inward Light* (International edition 1908).

ladyship will not be able to speak to us or we with her Sister should we come over.

Those days that we spent with these dear friends in Batavia were glory days! Those greedy creatures, those Javanese girlfriends of yours, can't get enough of friendship, love and affection; never, never get enough. And that is just what we discovered there.

Yesterday it was one year ago that the 'luckiest of the luckiest stars' brought them to us and who from then on have been inseparable from our very existence. The afternoon of that anniversary we spent at Klein Scheveningen, our marvellous beach that is now so much more dear to us because there we got to know her, she who has brought so much that is beautiful to our lives.

The sea was gloriously beautiful, so flat and what a play of colour the setting sun conjured up on it! It was like looking at a gigantic mother of pearl. In the West, the sky glowed with a fiery sun; in the South where sky and sea met it was coloured a pale violet. And then how kind to our eyes was that beautiful deep blue of the sky above us after all that blinding splendour! And there, in the midst of all that beauty, with our feet in the water, we relived that happy dream.

What silly, sentimental beings you must be thinking! Oh, youth and silliness, young and sentimental, they just belong together! We very much hope that we will always remain silly, never become reasonable, intelligent – that just makes everything so cold and unemotional! We shudder when confronted by everything that is cold and unemotional and yet it is preferable that things are icy cold than lukewarm!

Unfortunately till now we have not yet been able to visit our friends, the Ovink family in Jombang. We long to see each other again but every time we wanted to go something came up. If we do go there we will definitely go to Mojowarno about which we have heard so much. Mevrouw Ovink told us so many nice things about the Bervoets family who she respects very much. My uncle in Demak and his family have also been to Mojowarno and also sang its praises.

Should you make us happy with a letter could you make that pleasure even greater by telling us a great deal about yourself, your work and the people amongst whom you both are living. How long it takes for a letter posted from Gorontalo[90] to reach Java! One could almost just as well write to Holland – that takes almost just as long to arrive.

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[90] Gorontalo was the main KPM (shipping line) port for Central Sulawesi.

In June the entire family came over, all the children, the married ones and the grandchildren, all together. But no, not everyone: one place remained vacant, that of our dear brother in Holland. It was so nice to see all those dear faces together again but with sadness we thought of the absent one. He is such a dear, hearty boy who we all love very much. It is sad for the parents to think that those little things, for whom they are everything, who completely belong to them, will one day no longer be with them: we leave to each go our own way.

Hilda de Booij-Boissevain

19 August 1901

You must have thought it was not very nice of me to have delayed so long in answering your letter, your very dear invitation and your friendly gesture in sending us those photos with which I am so happy. That long silence was in no way meant unkindly but because that thoroughly healthy Kartini decided for a change to play the sick sister. It was quite nice to be spoiled for a change and I didn't mind at all to exaggerate my condition just a little. As long as none of those pairs of eyes that had looked at me with such concern are now looking over my shoulder and reading this. Boy, oh boy, how I would cop it then! Those sisters of mine can really give someone a going over, I can tell you. But what am I doing now, telling bad things about my dear sisters – that's too bad.[91] And I was going to offer my apologies for being absent for so long and to thank you for all your kindness.

Dear Hilda, you will forgive me, won't you, that this letter is being written only now rather than a week or so ago.

But now I do thank you, also on behalf of the sisters, for your kind invitation to come and stay. We thank you both for your kindness that we greatly appreciate. You know we would love to show you in reality how much we value your kind invitation. But dear Hilda, don't be angry, that we are only able to give you a token of our thanks for your sweet invitation on paper. Oh how very much we would love to see you all again and make the acquaintance of that little angel with whom we have an issue to discuss because he prevented his parents and little brother, that dear Tom, from coming to Jepara. But willing and being allowed to – alas – do not always go together! We Javanese girls are not allowed to travel alone, let alone that far! It was already something special

[91] Much of the following text of this letter derives from an extract reproduced in the appendix of the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Allard 1976).

that we were allowed to travel with our parents last year, that already was a big break with 'adat', which it seems our compatriots can't do without, I mean that dependence on principles, little laws, instituted centuries ago, even though they know only too well that many of them no longer suit the society of today. My compatriots are so conservative, unfortunately! People would protest if we girls travelled that far and on our own. For myself it is no problem, and such expressions of indignation don't affect us – we have a come to learn a different perspective. But we can't think only of ourselves: there are others who will take it to heart, and these are people who are very dear to us. Don't be angry dear Hilda that we will not be able to make use of your kind invitation – you now know the reason.

Oh, you don't know how much I would have loved to write to you: 'We are coming'. We would love to see you all again and those beautiful surroundings where we unfortunately were only able to stay briefly but which for us is unforgettable because we have so many dear memories of it. When we are allowed to fly out, and our path leads in your direction then I promise you we will come knocking at the home of the De Booij family and ask for your hospitality. I hope by then you will still want to have us. I am confident and have great hopes that that time will come – and who knows if that might be quite soon.

Nothing is impossible in this world and what today we might believe to be an impossibility is tomorrow a fact of life. Things are happening in Native society, the spirit of 'progress' has penetrated it and keeps things moving. However it bumps up against an ingrained, Javanese love of that outdated adat. There will still need to be a great deal of internal and other struggles before some of these ancient ideas and principles that do not fit with progress are buried deep in the ground to never rise again.

Oh goodness, how conceitedly I have been pontificating here – just laugh at it Hilda.

How pleased I am with that lovely photograph of the three of you that you sent me – the happy father and husband should have been in it as well. I have shown it to several people and each one is completely in agreement that it is a charming group. What a dear little poppet your youngest is. He is so sweet and so healthy and is looking so lovely. Oh, and the way little Tommy is standing here! Really, it is such a lovely group photo. Tom is already quite a little fellow compared to that little poppet on your lap.

I have stuck that photo in my album where you three are sitting amongst my family and friends – I can't stop looking at it. If Papa should take another photo of his threesome then I will be waiting to receive a copy.

With this we are sending you a photograph that we had taken a month or so ago. To own a camera and the associated equipment has long been amongst our dearest wishes. There are so many dear places – so many along the beach – that we would love to 'eternalize', but oh, photography is such an expensive hobby.

When last year we trained through the Preanger how we would have loved to have had a hand camera to be able to have photographed those beautiful places we flew past. Your husband should do that one day when he is travelling in the Preanger. I think it would be worthwhile.

A few weeks ago they launched a police boat that had been built here. We did not go on board during its trials, only the Assistant Resident did. Father thought it would be too frightening for us. But a day or so later we went out sailing in the new boat with a whole group of people. First the harbour sloop took us down river to the sea where we transferred to the large boat. We were nearly sent to Davy Jones's locker because we sailed into another boat. This was meant to represent a manoeuvre and for those standing on the shore it must have been a fine sight when the two boats in full sail sailed in stately fashion towards each other. The ladies started screaming but we had great fun, thought it an interesting adventure. It was full moon – we had first enjoyed a beautiful sunset and after that a wonderful moonrise. It was an unforgettable moment. It was so beautiful. We profited greatly from the occasion – a whole four hours sailing!

Now I had almost forgotten to tell you we received safely the postal order from your husband for the carved box for your brother-in-law. Please thank your husband for sending it. And dear Hilda, I thank you again for your friendly invitation. We really regret it greatly that we cannot take advantage of it; we would have loved to. But I want to be realistic and not sulk because I can't have it.

Goodbye dear Hilda! Regards to your husband from all of us. For your two dear little sons we send lots of kisses.

With a hearty embrace
Your Kartini

Mevrouw van Kol [92]

August 1901

Because I am so absolutely convinced that a woman can have a great influence on society I would wish for nothing more, wish more fervently than anything else, than to be trained to be a teacher, in order to later devote myself to the education of the daughters of native leaders. Oh I would so very, very much like to be in a situation to guide the hearts of little children, to form their little characters, develop their young brains; to form the women of the future, who could help advance and prepare the ground for a better life.

It would be such a benefit for native society if the women were well educated – and for women themselves. We fervently, fervently wish them education and training that it would be such a great benefit for them. There is so much misery in the world of our Javanese women, there is so much and such bitter suffering. The only future for a Javanese girl, and in particular for a girl of the nobility, is marriage.

What has convention made of this institution that originally was ordained by God and had been the greatest purpose of women? Marriage, which should be a vocation, has become a job! And oh, on what demeaning and humiliating terms and conditions do so many Javanese women have to fulfil that job! On the command of a father, uncle or brother, the young girl has to stand ready to follow a completely strange man who often already has a wife and children. She is not asked for her opinion, she has only to obey. Her presence is not even required at a wedding, not even her affirmation.

From a distance and from personal acquaintance we know about the hellish pain caused by the Islamic tradition that makes it so easy for men but which makes it, oh, so bitterly hard and cruel for women.

'They are used to it, they think nothing of it' says that all-knowing society. 'If they didn't like it why would they put up with it?'

Let me, a child of the Javanese people, raised in her midst and having lived my whole life here, assure you that Native women most certainly do have a heart which is as sensitive and which can suffer as much as the refined heart of women in your country. But here, they suffer in silence, and make do,

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[92] This appears to be the letter that Nellie van Kol wanted to see published in the Netherlands. Much of it reappears in her educational memoranda written two years later and broadly outlines her arguments regarding girls' education and the plan for her and her sisters' further studies. Although Kartini mentions them first in a letter to Marie Ovink-Soer in October the previous year, this letter has the appearance of being an initial introduction of their ideas. It is not clear why or when the correspondence with Nellie and Henry van Kol commenced but both became very influential in Kartini's life.

completely powerless and defenceless as they are because of their ignorance and inexperience.

The ancient story tells us: Fatima's husband remarried and she was asked by the prophet how she felt about it. 'Nothing Father, Nothing,' she declared. As she said this she leant against a banana tree. The leaves, at first fresh and bright, withered and the trunk against which her body was leaning, turned to coal.

Once again the father asked how she felt and again she declared: 'Nothing Father, nothing!' The Father gave her a raw egg and asked her to hold it against her heart. Asking for it back he broke it open: the egg was cooked!

Since then the heart of the Eastern woman has not changed. This tale teaches us immediately what the opinion of many women concerning that cruel male privilege is. Many think it an honour to endure with an impassive face her husband's one or more wives. But don't ask what is hidden behind such a steel mask and what the walls of her home hide from the view of the world: there are so many complaining women's hearts and innocent, suffering souls of little children.

Again: there is much bitter suffering in the world of our poor Native women. And it was that suffering which I had already witnessed in my childhood that first awakened in me the desire to oppose that tradition which appeared to justify those situations.

Our efforts have a dual aim; to labour for the uplifting of our people and to prepare the road for our sisters that will lead to a better, more dignified situation. To all of you who have an interest in Java and the Javanese we direct an urgent prayer: help us to realize our aim so that it may bring improvement to our people and our sex!

Educate the Javanese woman, develop her heart and intellect, and you friends of Java will find good co-workers for your noble, beautiful, huge task: the civilizing, the development and the uplifting of a nation! Teach her a trade so that she will no longer be defenceless prey when her guardians want her to enter a marriage that will inevitably tumble her and her possible children into misery.

We have seen such pitiable situations in many Javanese marriages caused by that cruel Islamic male privilege. The suffering of women in such relationships, the suffering of many a child born in such marriages, burns into our soul and drives us to rebel against such conditions! The only way to avoid such a life is for a girl to be enabled to support herself independently. There is no one yet who does this, who dares to do this!

It is a scandal if a girl does not marry, if a woman remains unmarried.

Our idea, once we are qualified, is to open a boarding school for the daughters of Native officials where, alongside all kinds of practical studies relevant for life, there will also be studies that will develop her spiritually and ennoble her mind.

Could such a school exist? We dare to say 'yes'. Even if the majority of Native leaders were to send their daughters merely for show, because they did not want to be seen as lagging behind the others and not because they were convinced of the value that more education for the woman would have for herself and her surroundings; that would not detract from the fact that gradually there would be more and more native officials and nobility who did want their daughters to have a broad education. Government and private schools are evidence of the truth of this observation. Even the King of Solo sends his daughters to school. In the progressive Preanger, where it is no longer a novelty for girls to go to school, a private school, subsidized by the Government has been opened.[93] There one can find daughters of regents going to a boarding school in a strange place. More parents who might dearly like their daughters to study, put aside that thought because they cannot in the end come to terms with the fact that sending their daughter to school would mean they would be studying alongside boys.

Engaging a governess would be far too expensive for the ordinary person – only very few people could afford such a luxury – yet there is a wedono, neither particularly enlightened nor particularly well-off, who has engaged a governess for his granddaughters.

There was a young mother who, on one of the last days before she died, made her husband promise, as soon as he was in a better position, to fulfil her dearest wish: 'to send their daughter to a European school.'

We often discussed the question and the idea of the independent, wage-earning woman with the wives of Native officials. And everything we heard then strengthens us in the hope that all it needs is to take the first step, that is, for someone to provide an example. And if this is seen to have practical benefit, and can be adopted by others, then it will undoubtedly gain support.

There are other girls who think and feel like we do and who would also love to break the bonds and chains that keep the Islamic woman cloistered. They also are brought to a standstill by: 'There is no one yet who does this.' And there has to be one who is the first!

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[93] Kartini refers several times in her correspondence to the greater level of Western education for women in West Java (Sunda). See also letters, 7 October 1900 and 30 September 1901.

There is one Native official who has requested the Director of Education, Religion and Industry to give permission for his daughter to be admitted to the training school for doctors.

Blessed father, blessed daughter! She will be of great benefit for her country. I hope that she will actually realize her ambition.

A younger sister of mine, Roekmini, is very attracted to the art of drawing, and it is her greatest dream to enter a drawing academy in order to be able to devote herself to the revival of Native art. Is folk art not also one of the means to contribute to a people's welfare? Should it appear that she is not suited to a drawing academy, that is to say that she does not have sufficient talent, she would transfer to a school of domestic economy in order to later teach women the value of money, something that is really necessary in Native society. The Government has the intention of teaching its Native officials thriftiness. What is the advantage to the Government if it forces men to put aside money when their women – the ones who control the housekeeping – don't know the value of money? My sister and I will then work together.

Another thing we would like to see taught at our future school is knowledge about good health, patient care and first aid! This is an area of learning that will always be of benefit and would be of great assistance in our situation. Every person sooner or later will be standing beside a sickbed and it is so wretched to see someone suffering and not to know how that suffering might be alleviated. Knowledge of good health, patient care and first aid must be part of any education. How many accidents could not have been avoided if men as well as women had been taught that useful knowledge.

It is in no sense part of our aim to turn Javanese into European Javanese by giving them a broad education. Our idea is to provide them, alongside their own beautiful qualities, the finer things from other nations; not to suppress their own qualities but to enrich them.

How much I enjoyed your 'Introduction' to *The Land and People of Java*.[94] My heart swelled and glowed when I read those inspired words that described the beauty of my country and … laid bare its problems.

We are often overwhelmed by the most joyous feelings when we wander in God's free, wide nature! Far, far removed from people's petty-minded concerns, alone with our soul, with our thoughts, in the wonderfully beautiful nature, above us the blue sky, at our feet the endless sea, behind us the waving palm fronds. Oh, we can't get enough of that. I have often caught myself out

[94] Henri van Kol's *Land en Volk van Java* (1896) was published under the pseudonym 'Rienzi'. Kartini suggests that his wife wrote the introduction.

for having an egotistical thought: 'Oh please leave me on my own in these pure surroundings, far from the bustle of the market, from worldly affairs, all alone with nature and my soul.' That is pure egotism. No, that is not our destiny: we must live for and with others. To make life better, that is our purpose!

But now, I have held you up long enough, you will have other and more useful things to do than to listen to the prattle of a 'sentimental' young Javanese girl.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 Aug. 1901

My dearest Mevrouw, what tidings you have brought me! To think that Mijnheer has been in such danger! Thank God, thank God that it is over! I was so shocked to hear it and we are still upset about it! Happy as I always am on receiving a letter from you when I opened your letter a moment ago I had barely glanced at it when my feelings changed to one of a growing anxiety. Increasingly gripped by a feeling of anxiety, I read your letter until I came to the happy news: 'The danger has now subsided!' which called forth a heartfelt 'Thank God!' from the bottom of my heart.

We cannot tell you how grieved we all were that Mijnheer had been so very ill and we are all pleased and grateful that the danger has subsided. We hope fervently that your patient may continue to progress and that Mijnheer's condition may improve daily and that he may soon be completely recovered.

We can imagine your patient lying in the chaise longue – resting, not moving, as the doctor had prescribed. We can so easily imagine how difficult His Excellency finds it. Complete rest for someone whose love in life is to work! Give His Excellency our warmest regards and tell His Exc. that we are praying for his speedy and complete recovery. We were told once that a prayer arising from the depth of one's heart will rise upwards and make its way to heaven to Him – no prayer could be more feelingly or sincerely offered than ours for Mijnheer's recovery.

And as long as you yourself will not become ill as a result of the tension and anxiety. How pleased and thankful we are that you have your son and sister with you. The presence of these two people, who completely share your anxiety and cares, must be a support and comfort to you in these difficult hours.

21 Aug.

Today a year ago I received your first letter and now on the first anniversary of that happy moment I have received such a letter from you! How it grieves

me that the day before yesterday I sent you that silly girlish chatter. Forgive me, I could not know that those cries of joy would reach you in such a difficult time. Will you send me, even if it is but a single word in a postcard, some news on how the patient is? If you yourself are unable to do so will you, on our behalf, ask your son to do this? We will both be very grateful. As you will understand, we are very keen to know how Mijnheer is and how you yourself are. I would be very grateful for your letter.

Goodbye for now my dearest, keep well! Warm greetings from our parents and a hearty embrace from your trio. With you always,

your own true
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

27 August 1901

Hello, my own dearest Mevrouw! How are you? Does your beloved patient continue to improve? Has His Honour really progressed since you wrote to me with such concern? We sincerely hope so and pray fervently that there may soon be a complete recovery! The two of you have not been out of my thoughts for a moment since I learned that Mijnheer has been so ill and you have experienced such anxiety and concern. And often I thought: 'How will things be with them now?' Then I would hope furiously that Mijnheer would be well and that his dear, kind wife, his loyal nurse, has been able to conquer the misery into which the sudden, frightening illness of her spouse has plunged her. How thankful I was that at the time you wrote to me, that the danger had passed even if the illness had not quite disappeared; we hope sincerely that it now has.

How I long to be able to fly over to see you both or that I could only whisk you over by magic out of that hot, busy Batavia to this quiet, peaceful, place! The peace and solitude would be so good for the unsettled spirits and the fresh, healthy sea air with its invigorating qualities would, who knows, achieve wonders for those severely drained energies!

The days here are now wonderful – that is, the mornings and evenings are deliciously cool; in contrast, in the middle of the day, it can be very warm, but the sea regularly sends us her fresh greetings! At noon when the beaming Queen of the Day lets us feel how powerful she can be, a soft wind arrives, a greeting of love from the sea, which fans the warmth from us with tender caresses.

We are all well – the day before yesterday was a happy day for us: we received the news by telegraph that Kartono had passed his State Examination. He has worked well this last year – his regrets concerning that earlier, costly time are very genuine!

Goodbye, dearest Mevrouw! Very shortly the post will be going and this one must go with it.

Warmest greetings from us all to Mijnheer. Imagine yourself to be warmly embraced by

Your devoted
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

4 September 1901

My dearest Mevrouw, thank you so much for both your postcards that I received in good order and which partly gladdened us and partly grieved us. We are happy that your beloved patient is improving, saddened that you are still so anxious.

We can so completely empathize with you, poor dear; we also know what it feels like to have to see a dear one in great danger – even when the doctor has declared that the danger has passed and the patient is safe and has been declared by him to be completely cured; even then, the fear which had gripped our heart does not leave us and in the hours of fear almost chokes us with its iron grip. Often we feel it again if we notice the slightest thing out of the ordinary in our beloved patient who is in the process of recovering. Oh, we hear and see everything so terribly clearly when it concerns our beloved patient!

With heart and soul we hope with you and for you that the fresh mountain climate will be good for your patient and that His Excellency will return to Batavia completely recovered – in due course. How is His Exc. now, and how are you yourself, dearest? Never has the distance between Batavia and Jepara seemed such an abomination as in these last weeks. I would so very, very much like to be with you, to help you, to comfort you, as much as I can.

It is terrible to know that our dear friends are experiencing such anxiety and concern and not be able to be with them, to help them come through their difficult times. All I can do is send you words on paper which have to act as interpreters of my deep empathy and sympathy for you. And even that I cannot do adequately! What you hear is a child's stammer; I feel it so much more

deeply and richly. It is such a debilitating feeling, being conscious of one's own powerlessness!

How very, very kind of Mijnheer to write to us while His Exc. was so ill. Tears came to our eyes when we read it in your card. Thank His Exc. warmly on our behalf for that – even though we do not yet have the letter, the intention – now already partly fulfilled – is not less than the deed itself. Thank you both also for the hearty congratulations on Kartono's examination results. You can imagine how pleased our parents were with this. Also thank your son from us for his good wishes.

Our dear parents are full of hope and good spirits – we are too. That Klaverbond, who is firmly resolved to stand or fall together has found allies here locally for the struggle in which we have been engaged against deep-rooted, ancient beliefs, habits and customs. Our parents idolize the Quartero family and Mijnheer thus has much influence on our dear, kind father. Brother Quartero will, as much as it lies within his power, help and support his sisters in the realization of their dreams, which he so much supports. Where we need advice or support in this, he is available day and night, as is his dear wife, who is in total sympathy with our plans. We did warn him beforehand that whoever was fond of us would be grieved – about us; but, in the same way as you, they want to share everything with us – happiness and suffering. Oh, and we have already experienced so much together.

It is wonderful, heavenly, to know we are loved – naturally when that feeling is reciprocal. It makes us so grateful but at the same time so melancholy because we know that sadness is inseparable from loving us. Properly considered, we are but miserable beings – only fit to be trodden on. What have we spread around us, presented to all those whose hearts beat so warmly for us? Suffering, suffering, nothing but suffering! It sometimes grieves me so that in life it is just those who one wishes so desperately to safeguard from any suffering who suffer most – because of us! 'Through suffering to blessedness!'[95] It's a nice thought, but in practice, how difficult.

There is someone who has a great deal of influence on our parents and also declares not to hate us. Especially for our dear parents we would very much like that person to be on our side but this person, who could do so much to lessen the pain of the wounds which we will inflict on our parents' heart, is definitely against our aims and striving – considers what we wish and long for to be nonsense. I cannot, I will not yet believe that this is seriously meant, because,

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[95] This appears to be a reference to the same hymn from which Kartini later quotes a verse from which the title of the 1911 publication is taken. (See Kartini to EC Abendanon, 15 August 1902.)

to the extent that we know him, whatever else he might be, narrow-minded he definitely is not.[96] And yet he has made it clear enough what he thinks of our 'silly' ideas. He has given me many books, the very latest which have been published, on the lives of women – about work etc., etc. – the general tendency of which is, if not definitely then at least noticeably, anti-New Woman: 'It is a monstrous delusion of our misdirected society', Lady Lohman says in the foreword of one of those books.[97]

I have to smile about this however. Is the intention to attempt to convert us in this manner? At one moment I am considered a mere chicken, barely hatched from its egg, and the next, that I am too old to begin to study. That I am already old, I know for myself and I do not try to hide it but why then wait so long with a decision? I am certainly not getting any younger – indeed each day makes me one day older. And in my case every day is one more day. What we want is 'madness'. Certain plans are too silly to talk about. 'The girls must marry!'

Was it for this reason I was given that priceless book from which I might learn how one can become and be a desirable, ideal, spouse? What one has to do as a spouse to make 'him' comfortable!! We would love to see a counterpart to the above from which the man might learn how he could make a woman happy, how he can become and be an ideal spouse!

The dear French baroness does not like to see 'that a woman argues with gentlemen, specifically contradicting their opinions. What she gains by exhibiting her intellectual abilities she loses in goodwill, and this is surely worth more than genius.'!!![98] It was this thought that a woman teacher must have had when she criticized another female teacher for doing what she knew gentlemen abhorred. 'I have never done it – I know gentlemen abhor it!' This was said in the presence of her pupils – two young girls nearing adulthood. Automatically three pairs of eyes searched each other out and exchanged glances of mutual

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96 The reference appears to be to the Semarang Resident, Piet Sijthoff. See also letter to Ovink-Soer, August 1900. The other influential figure Kartini constantly accuses of attempting to thwart her aspirations was her uncle, the Regent of Demak.

97 The Dutch aristocrat, Anna Maria de Savornin Lohman (1868–1930) held conservative views on the position of women and rejected progressive feminists' emphasis on women gaining education and paid work. Her *Het Ééne Noodige* (1897), a novella, advocated marriage as the only essential aim for 'ladies'. Her other well-known publication was *De Liefde in de Vrouwen-questie* (Love and the Woman Question) attracted a strong response from the socialist feminist, Cornélie Huygens who published *De Liefde in het Vrouwenleven Voorheen en Thans* (Love in the Lives of Women in the Past and Today) in reply. Both books appeared in a second edition in 1899 reflecting the intensity of the debate amongst feminists. Kartini would have been alerted to this debate through the pages of *De Gids*.

98 The reference appears to be to Lohman's *Het Ééne Noodige*.

understanding. The speaker saw this look and we could tell by her face how much she regretted having revealed her view. Those young girls, her pupils, will no doubt later become gems of women – wonderful models.[99]

Knowing what and who we are, we just cannot understand why those girls are purposefully being brought into contact with us. Are they not afraid to allow the pernicious influence of the noble trio to exercise itself on those young, pure, innocent, blank souls? Are they so convinced of their invulnerability? These girls surprised us even more by asking whether in the following year, after they had completed their education and their governess had left – they could come to us to learn a few things. We told them they could come when, and as long as they wished, as long as they did not come to learn, because there was nothing for them to learn here – rather we could learn from them how young girls should behave, how they could make themselves desirable etc., etc.[100]

But to return to our presenter of books: I shall, I must have it from his own lips that he is indeed against our struggle after he has first listened to me. Personally he has never heard me nor have I personally said a thing to him about it but it appears the little birds have told him everything that lives, thinks and hunts in these three heads. Should he really hold this opinion – then nothing will be able to change it. We could not possibly convince him of another view. He can reason well, is known for this ability – and will no doubt talk us – poor things – into the ground but whether this would be convincing we will have to wait and see. We know that, even if we cannot compete against his excellent ability in logic we will, nonetheless, not surrender. For that our ideal is too dear to us and too tightly interwoven in our existence for us to be able to give it up, unless there were a mighty and invincible reason for it.

Oh! We cannot, we will not believe that our lives would end in such an ordinary, such a banal way as that of thousands of others before us. And yet, at times, anything else seems most unlikely. Sometimes the realization of our dearest and most earnest wishes seems so close at hand and then at other times it seems so infinitely far away. There are times when that poor tortured heart, pitched from side to side, asks in self-doubt: 'My God, what then is duty?'

Hypocrisy is referred to as duty – self-realization is called duty! How can two things, directly opposed to each other, be referred to as – and be – 'duty'.

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99 This appears to be an autobiographical note recounted in Kartini's characteristic mocking tone.

100 These somewhat oblique comments appear to relate to her cousins, the daughters of her Demak uncle.

'Stay' – a voice here inside calls out – 'stay, overcome your own wishes and desires for the sake of those who are dear to you and to whom you are dear: this, your struggle, enriches you as a person – stay!' And then another voice, equally loud and strong: 'Go – work at the realization of your ideals, work for the future – work for the well-being of thousands who are bent under the unrighteous laws, under the false understandings of good and evil – go, go, suffer and struggle but work for the future!' What is now the greater duty – the first or the second?

Egotism I have always regarded as the worst sin that exists and deeply, deeply despise it – similarly ingratitude – while that other, our ideal, has become part of our existence. We cannot live without it, no less than we can live without the love of those who are dear to us. There are not many – even when considering those with whom we have close ties of blood – who so completely understand each other as my father and I. How many points of contact and similarity are there not in our two characters – we agree in so many areas. Only on one point do our characters not come into contact. Oh, and why is this so, why? Could it be true what is asserted, that in the entire wide world of nature there are no two things that are completely the same, no two human natures that are entirely one?

My own dear Father – we both know very well how dear we are to each other, we also know full well, that the path that your daughters have chosen is sown with thorns. But you also know that it is no caprice that leads us; that we are committed to our ideal with heart and soul, as we are to you. Why, why then make a difficult road still more difficult by withholding your permission? That we cannot be happy without your blessing you know but nor can we be without our ideals. With your blessing there will always be a light before our eyes – the most difficult road will be passable! Father, Father, why can you not give into me on that one point?

That love is all-powerful has been stated and shown for centuries. The love we both have for each other is great. Oh Love, often praised, but, alas, often mourned! Love, do your blessed work with us, sweep away the points of difference between our two characters, make them become one!

I love my Father very, very much, you know that, but my Father's love for me is yet greater. I used to be so quickly impatient, irritated – in a word, ill-tempered – but how patiently my dear Father bore my whims! I have never heard a hard or bitter word – Father is always loving and kind! In everything I feel his infinite love! When some time ago I insisted on the speedy resolution of our business I saw him glance at me so sadly, it was as if those sad eyes wanted to ask: 'Are you then in so much of a hurry to leave me, child?' I

averted my face, I did not want to look into those clear, kind eyes. I wanted to be strong and not weak!

My heart almost broke with sorrow once when the two of us stood opposite each other, Father took me in his arms and asked in a trembling voice: 'Must it then be like this? Can it not be otherwise? Must they all be like you – can it not be otherwise?' What must have been happening then in his heart and in my heart when we stood, heart to heart, looking into each other's moist eyes? There was great suffering then, as heavy as is possible on earth. That was shortly before Father's illness. Later when Father was recovering, Moeder asked me: 'Oh child, go on, give in.' 'I can't,' I answered in a stifled voice.

Since then Moeder no longer speaks to me about it. And then Mama, poor dear, she has been very, very sweet to us. If Father accedes, then Mama will not withhold her blessing. They are all dear and gentle with us – this makes the struggle only more difficult. When they all treat us so lovingly and gently then we consider ourselves such evil spirits. Do you now believe that we are young girls fit only to be trodden on?

Suffering, suffering, suffering – nothing but suffering have we brought to all those loving, devoted hearts. And this letter is clear evidence of all this! I am truly a fine comfort – I was going to comfort you and now I fill you with misery. Forgiveness, dearest. No, not another word about all this – later, when Mijnheer has completely recovered and you are again at ease we will tell you about our plans.

Now I would like to offer Mijnheer, through you, our sincerest thanks for the most charming teacher His Exc. has provided for our town.[101] Mej[uffrow] Glaser, who arrived last Thursday, stayed with us for several days, so that in this way, we have come to know her more than just superficially. We believe we will be able to gain much from her, leaving aside the question of whether or not she will be able to gain much from us. We are prepared to hope for the best. An acquaintance had telegraphed Father asking him to make a vehicle available to bring her here from the station – we knew nothing about her at the time but thought it so unfortunate for a woman, young or old, that she had to arrive at a strange place, alone and unknown, and a hotel makes you feel this even more. So we prepared a room for her – our newcomer should be able to find her feet in a homely environment. Poor thing, she so dreads staying in a hotel. Had we only more rooms we would gladly keep her here but we have

[101] As Director of Native Education, Abendanon was able to appoint a teacher, Annie Glaser, who he believed would be able to assist Kartini in preparing for teacher certificate examinations.

only two guest rooms and regularly receive visitors. She is accustomed to a homely life and is very fond of it. The only one she could stay with would be the Ass. Resident but we do not know that family well enough to suggest such a thing.

The day before yesterday we visited Juffrouw Glaser in her hotel – it was the first time we had seen the inside of the lodging house and we can now readily understand that a young girl of her education and refinement would not much feel like living there. She is really too good and beautiful for Jepara. She is such a young thing – we first thought she was much younger than me, younger even than Kleintje, she still seems so young, but later it appeared that she is two years older than me. She appears to us to be a decent, nice, upright girl – she immediately made a nice impression on us. She is a fine, ethereal being who does not fit into such simple surroundings as this at all.[102]

We like her very much and have spent wonderful days with her. Of course Klein Scheveningen had to play a part in this. We have already been there three times and have bathed there twice. From everything she does we can see she is definitely no 'meisje cari mans' (the latest name for a girl angling for men).[103] We have already discovered we have many points of agreement in our thinking – ideas, thoughts, feelings and tastes. She is such a happy thing – we of course have already been up to some mischief. She may yet lose some prestige in the eyes of her pupils because of us. She suggested we hold a discussion circle in her house each Wednesday. So many old wives together, heavens, what a lot of gossiping there will be – and bad-mouthing on a large scale. That will no doubt happen; a day or so ago we severely took one lady to task – namely A. de Savornin Lohman.

How nice, though, that your son knows her – in The Hague she often danced with him. We showed her the photographs of all of you – she recognized your sons and the portraits of you both were so familiar to her. We had a wonderful time talking about you with her. She is looking forward to meeting you very much – and she is especially in raptures about a certain person. When she saw the photograph of that someone she said: 'Now, that is a face one could immediately feel very fond of and rely on.' I will not mention the name of that someone otherwise that someone may become conceited. Annie Glaser and I have good plans, just listen: we will both do batik, model clay, cook and learn

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102 While Kartini's description suggests Anneke Glaser was a newcomer to Java, family records indicate she was born in Semarang. She had evidently undertaken teacher qualifications in the Netherlands. She later refused a request from Abendanon to contribute her letters from Kartini for publication and is reported to have burnt them.

103 This is a characteristic colonial (Indo) mix of Dutch and Malay languages: 'meisje' (D. = girl) cari (Ind. = search, looking for), 'mans' (Indisch Dutch) (D. = mannen).

Javanese. As to the latter, she already has an understanding of pronunciation. She also paints and plays – it is wonderful, she has played many favourites of ours on the piano. She also has a mandolin.

Goodbye dearest, all the best with your patient. Our warmest greetings to you both – also to your son. Keep your spirits up, dearest – with a hearty kiss from your trio, your own devoted one takes her leave.

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 September 1901

My dearest Mevrouw, many, many thanks for your long letter! I will not have to tell you how very happy we were to receive it. It contains so much that makes our little hearts beat wildly – in the first place the wonderful news about the good progress of your dear patient.

How is it now with His Exc.? Going from better to best – we earnestly hope so! We were also very happy with Mijnheer's kind little letter. I did so want to reply to His Exc. immediately on receiving it but fever, headache, a cold, toothache, and I know not what else which came to tease me, made it impossible for me to give effect to my intentions. When I was back on deck our poor father became ill, and seriously too, so that once again nothing came of the writing.

Now all that suffering has, thank God, passed – Father has recovered. It was such a happy afternoon when that wonderful letter of yours arrived, the *f*25 you sent I received safely and gave *f*10 to the carpenter who had just that day delivered me the stag head I had ordered. What shall I do with it? Keep it here and wait with sending it until the other orders are delivered – or shall I send it in advance?

Oh very best wishes, dearest, with the engagement of your youngest son! Oh, we were so surprised when I and my sisters read that Dolf – your Doppie, the Benjamite – was engaged![104] We think it's so nice but still can't get used to the idea that your Benjamin, your youngest son, is engaged! We shall ensure that the jewelry case for your prospective daughter-in-law – your first daughter – will be perfect! We will have the case completely carved with wayang puppet figures – a complete wayang story on the lid and the sides like the box for the

[104] The reference is to Geldolph Abendanon. Benjamite is a reference to him being the youngest son.

Queen. Is that all right? Would it not be better to carve 'Marie' in Javanese letters? It would then stay in style, the name of your future daughter would then be immortalized.

And please, will you do us a great, great favour and allow us to undertake the lining of the box? Please, will you leave that little task to us? We will really, really do our best not to spoil it. If you just give us the colour of the satin with which you want to have the box lined, or else send us the satin for it, if you prefer. Can I then also have a silver edge made like the one that borders the lining of the box for the Queen? The lid of that box was carved on both sides with different wayang figures and on the sides where there was no carving it is lined with satin and set off with silver. It looks very fine!

I will hear from you then if you intend to stay with your initial idea and have the lid carved only on the top. And yes, may we do this small task for you? We would love to do it, to have contributed to something that will no doubt bring a happy gleam in the eyes of your future daughter, the queen of your Benjamin's heart. Will I hear from you soon, what your decision on these matters is? Just tell me with a single word – by postcard – if you approve or not. It would disappoint us terribly if it should be the latter.

And now my dear, good Angel – my deepest thanks for the wonderful support you have expressed for our struggle, of which your latest pages give such evidence! Oh, what would we have done without it? Our wonderful young lives would no doubt have bled and gone under in a useless battle against old prejudices! Now, no matter how hard the struggle may sometimes become, the friendship of you both and your wonderful support keep us going! My dear, kind Angel, we are after all children of good fortune – well, we are advantaged over thousands with that wonderful, beautiful golden treasure which we have in your love and understanding. We would not exchange places with anyone, anyone in the world. There is so much that is beautiful in our lives that are full of struggle!

No, we do not want to exchange with anyone, neither our love nor our suffering!

27 Sept.

I got this far last night when our Kartinah suddenly developed a high fever and bad headache. The poor thing did not close an eye all night – this morning around twelve the high temperature dropped a little. Now she still has a fever but the terrible headache has left her. I have had to set aside my plan to finally write you a long letter about all kinds of things – all those other things in your letter I will answer as soon as possible, now I cannot.

The Quartero family is staying here at the moment. Mijnheer's appointment has finally come through and our sobats are leaving here for their new location – Madura. My oldest brother[105] who was also promoted and has been transferred to Semarang, is also staying here at the moment with his wife. He arrived here ill this morning – also fever and a bad headache and the day after tomorrow he will travel on.

With this I am sending you a letter from Dr Adriani that I received a few weeks ago. R. also received such a long one – that one we will send you some other time.

Goodbye dearest Mevrouw – our warmest greetings to Mijnheer. Till next we hear from you. In the meantime your threesome thanks you for – you know what. With a hearty kiss from the three of us – your own devoted

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

25 September 1901

My right hearty thanks for sending what I had requested, dearest. Everything was received in good order, including the measurements and pattern for the table. What a lot of bother I have given you! Once again our sincerest thanks for everything you have done for me. I will shortly write to you about the small table which has been ordered, I have several questions for you about it. At the moment I cannot write any more than this card as my right hand is bandaged. Nothing significant, but it makes writing difficult

Our little brother is today finally free of fever, thank God! The little fellow has suffered much.

It is most likely that you will see Anne one of these days; should this happen after you receive this card will you give her warm greetings from us all and tell her we cannot yet write to her. Would you also tell her why.

I will have my friend the woodcarver come tomorrow straightaway to speak to him about your order.

Goodbye, with very much love from us all and for yourself a hearty kiss from R and your K

[105] The reference is to Raden Mas Slamet Sosroningrat (1873–?), her oldest brother.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

30 September 1901

My dearest Mevrouw, how wonderful that Mijnheer is making such good progress! A walk of half an hour at a stretch for someone who has been very ill is truly no small thing. Our very warmest congratulations, dearest with the return to health of Mijnheer! May a complete recovery follow speedily. The receipt of your card bearing such good news took my breath away, it was a ray of light in the dark, fearful days that are now, thank God, behind us.

Oh! We have experienced such anxiety with our poor Kleintje who, in the afternoon of the Monday before last, suddenly became unwell, without any previous symptoms. She had a fever but it was so strange – one moment she was burning hot, the next she was quite cool for a little while. I was not at ease and truly my premonition was not mistaken. After midnight she became so severely ill, that we feared the worst. The doctor who was called in, as well as the Quarteros were at a loss for words, they were dumbfounded. They had stood beside many sickbeds but they had never witnessed such a case. Sister was suffering from the same illness she had last February when she had been so terribly ill. The fever continued to go up and down, she had a headache, stomachache, backache, then there was a stiffening in her hands and feet which had turned cold, and had twisted. As well, there was a stiffening in her jaws, breathing had become difficult and bronchial and was loud enough to be heard outside the room. It was heart-breaking to watch, yet we could not let it affect us, we had to keep control of our nerves: firmness and action was what was required here. The suffering was terrible – physically and emotionally. What we had to experience in those hours was indescribable. It was as though my heart kept standing still.

After several terrible hours the condition of our poor sister settled down, the stiffening lessened and her breathing became more regular. But then suddenly the temperature increased with such a frightful speed that the doctor, who had only just left, was brought back. Sister glowed as though she was on fire and her condition deteriorated. Right at the beginning, before she experienced the stiffening in her joints, when her temperature was quite high, the doctor had wanted to give her a 'phenacetine' injection but Heer Q. advised against it because that little number is not without its side effects and sister was not strong.[106] But in the end the doctor had to take this course of action, the fever

[106] Phenacetine (acetophenetidin) an early synthetic analgesic developed in 1897 and administered to reduce fever. It was considered risky because of its effects on the heart and nervous system.

could not be allowed to climb any higher. To be on the safe side however the doctor, in consultation with Heer Q., decided to administer only half a dose and indeed, Heer Q. had predicted correctly – it worked on her immediately. Towards morning she fell asleep.

The following day she was, of course, exhausted. We were not at all looking forward to the departure of the Quartero family – she was very attached to them and they would be leaving that afternoon. However beyond all expectations she coped with it all rather calmly. Only for an instant did the corners of her pale mouth tremble and her tired eyes gleam moistly. Later the Dr. said that Kleintje's strange illness was the result of her being overwrought, the cause would have to be ascribed to weak nerves. Yes, truly, sister had been terribly excited that afternoon and evening. Oh, that unwise child, she just could not accept that she happened to be ill just when our friends were to leave. Months beforehand she had already thought up a charming celebration and farewell dinner, had thought of all kinds of things to make the last moments of our being together happy ones. She became terribly excited and kept saying she was not ill while she was in fact glowing with the fever. She insisted on coming outside, and became even more emotional when we of course firmly attempted to prevent her. That morning she looked as if she had been ill for more than a month.

Kartinah, who was feeling better on the day of Kleintje's illness, had a relapse when, as a result of all the to-ing and fro-ing through the house, she realized that something serious had happened and that it concerned her beloved sister, whose heavy breathing she could hear from her room. What a to-do! Fortunately she had recovered again the following day. But that day Kleintje was continually fighting back her tears. This time it was the separation of the Q. family that affected her. I waited with bated breath, realizing that this could not be good for her. But what could be done? In the first phase of sadness one is not receptive to comfort, even were it to come from heaven. The following day she got up still feverish, remained so the whole day and at midnight woke with a severe headache. Again we experienced some anxious hours. The whole day she was in a serious condition, each time her headache became very severe she would become deathly pale and her burning lips would turn white. In the early morning she already had a temperature of 40 degrees, and her headache became progressively worse. We were desperate – the doctor was no longer available – we had to help ourselves. Everything was tried – nothing helped. At our wits' end, we had her massaged and, oh blessed inspiration, almost immediately the pain decreased. After quarter of an hour she drifted off to

sleep and she slept peacefully till the following morning when she got up without a headache.

It was 5 o'clock in the afternoon when the terrible pains had diminished and sister fell asleep – it was then, when I stepped outside for a breath of fresh air, that I found your happy card. It had been a truly terrible time. Just before all this began at home, Mama had received a desperate letter from sister informing her that her youngest child, without having been ill or having had an accident, was all of a sudden unable to walk. Yesterday we received a message to say that he had improved somewhat and with someone holding his hand, the little fellow could again take some steps. Hardly had we been freed from Kleintje's illness when Father did the inadvisable thing of taking a journey of 23 paal each way in burning heat to visit a niece, a daughter of his only surviving sister who had come to visit us, who was deathly ill. The previous days had been extremely tiring, full of anxiety and concern, and moreover, Father had had little rest, had recently been ill himself and had left that morning with a headache. Since his severe illness Father has no longer been as strong as he was. On his return home that evening Father, as it were, just fell down. The whole evening and night he lay groaning although emphatically claiming all the while that there was nothing wrong with him. I see that it is not only children who can be unwise. Again we had to endure an anxious night and day. We had to convince Father to use an ice pack. It helped immediately. After a peaceful night Father got up refreshed. Thank God – that was a relief for us.

The sisters have now also recovered. Kartinah is regaining her strength and Kleintje is regaining some colour, yesterday and the day before she just looked blue. As long as she takes care and eats well she should be completely well again soon. At the moment she is still very weak. That child can be so very foolish – she just will not accept what a priceless possession good health is, that good health is the first precondition for any possible good fortune and it ought to be one of our first responsibilities, if not the very first duty, to take care of our health. A sickly person is of little or no use to society, a source of sorrow for himself and his surroundings. Do write to her later that she must take good, good care of her health, if not for herself, then for our sake, who are so saddened when she is unhappy. Last night she laughed again; what pleasure that gave us. This morning I got up so bright, I was happy and felt in a happy, grateful mood the entire day. Everyone received an extra smile and friendly word, as though this was important to them. The preceding week had been so terrible, so deathly and sad – the darkened rooms, the hushed speaking, the walking on tip-toes – it was all so sombre.

Now I am concerned about my dear loyal R. – that dear soul looks as though she might collapse at any moment. In that one week she has become noticeably thin-looking particularly poorly. And of course, how could it be otherwise, she has slept so little, is constantly on the go, and then to experience such anxiety – she is so very fond of her sister. At the moment she has an earache. On one of those anxious nights she caught a cold, and was so involved in nursing our sick one she did not attend to it. Now she has a severe pain in her ear, I only hope it will not get worse. Also dear Ma is complaining about feeling depressed. Poor thing, what has not been asked of her meagre reserves of nerves and energy in these last days. Only her will to be strong for her children has kept her going. Oh, when I think about all that misery, I want to throw myself on to the ground and scream and give vent to all my suffering as a young child does, fortunately I am not given an opportunity to be so foolish.

Cholera has also broken out here, but due to the excellent precautions taken by the authorities it has taken few victims to date. Then there is another demon doing terrible work here: a nasty fever accompanied by diarrhoea that has already taken many lives. But then the weather has also been bad – cold evenings, burning hot during the day, sharp winds and dust. It is an unhealthy time, everywhere in fact.

Just a moment ago I received your letter, thank you! Wonderful that I may complete the box, thank you for that also, and that you approve of those suggestions also gives me pleasure. I only hope now that everything will work out well. I will have more than enough satin in a length of 2 el I think. Would you please wait for a reply on the very important point in your previous letter? As soon as better times arrive and my head has cleared again, then a thick letter will be immediately sent off to you dealing exclusively with that topic. At the moment I cannot write to you on that question, my head cannot cope with it. It is still too filled with the grief it has experienced. But in the meantime would you pass on to Mijnheer my Father's sincere thanks for the fulfilment of his wishes. Annie Glaser is a great comfort to me in these days – she comes to visit us almost every afternoon. These visits really cheer me up – I certainly need it – I had to remain brave for the sake of my poor worried parents and sister R. who were very depressed.

Tell your dear Didi, our brother Edi – can I say that? – that we think it so wonderful to have such support and interest for our affairs on his part, that we are very, very grateful for it. That interest of his is a special support to us and an indication that our ideas are not mistaken. Wonderful that he plans to travel across Java and to call in on Jepara. The sisters are already extending

a warm welcome to him! We think this is simply a marvellous prospect. He really must, must do it, come here, and meet the sisters. Brother Edi will also be heartily welcomed by our parents!

May it happen soon and let him arrange his arrival here when it is full moon. We want Jepara to please brother Edi just as it did his mother. It has long been a dream of ours to go sailing during a full moon with, at some distance behind us, a prauw in tow with our glass gamelan[107] and its invited players. To sail in this fashion quietly over the pale and sparkling sea, and be gently rocked from time to time by small waves breaking against the sides with a soft splash, and echoing sweetly across the waters – as if carried by the fresh evening breeze that gently caresses one's face – and the pure sounds of the gamelan. That would be heavenly. Your Edi also enjoys it, does he not? How wonderful it would be then to be able to talk about everything our hearts suggested. He must not make a flying visit here. We must get to know each other well. Your son and we must become good friends, that is self-evident. Do not now go and spoil our personal acquaintance-making by telling him too many nice things about that small paradise in Jepara and about the 'angels' who live there; then there will be less likelihood of him leaving this heaven on earth disappointed.

Oh, we think it is so wonderful that he has such feelings for our affairs and takes such a lively interest in them. It was wonderful to hear it. We are longing for the letter in which you, or he himself, announce his coming. It will be such a joy to get to know a young man who is so interested in the 'women's issue'. His sympathy for our ideas and struggle strengthens us, gives us more courage to go on. We hope sincerely that with a personal and deeper acquaintance, we will not disappoint him. Thank you so much, dearest – the fact that our affairs have gained his sympathy is your work, you have won him for us!

1 October

We have always understood the purpose of the proposed Native arts and crafts exhibition from the moment we heard about it, from the way you described it. Dr A[driani] cannot have understood it properly when the forthcoming exhibition was discussed that evening at your house. His Exc. had spoken about an ethnographic exhibition – while Mijnheer's plan was to hold an exhibition of Native art and craft industries on behalf of the people themselves. Mijnheer wanted to show the public at large what the Native, in whom Mijnheer has such an interest, is capable of. In short, the aim is to encourage Native industry and crafts, to help it flourish, and thereby to bring

[107] This appears to be a glass replica of some traditional gamelan instruments suitable in this case in being both lighter and not damaged by water.

greater welfare to the people. Did we understand it aright? I recall that there was talk of Dr A. bringing several Torajas over for the occasion, not to put them on show, but to show the public here how, for instance, they make their clothes from bark, etc., etc.[108]

Yes, we know the Raden Ayu of Bandung. She has been to school and speaks Dutch, her husband does not but understands it well. We only know her slightly – we know a younger sister of hers better, she had visited us here several years ago. She is a very nice child, now married, living in Buitenzorg – fortunately with a civilized, educated man. She had boarded with Europeans, was brought back home from there because her family thought she was becoming more and more Europeanized and was finding it more and more difficult to relate to a Native way of life. I was told this by a cousin of hers, the first man of our social position, not a family member, with whom we girls had spoken. This great event (!) occurred last year while we were staying in Bandung. Why do I refer to that Raden Ayu as a poor little woman? Is she not, after all, extremely fortunate according to a Native point of view? She has achieved what is available to very few, and which is the highest ideal of all aristocratic Native women: to be the wife of a Regent! An unfortunate Regent's wife – that does not exist – ask that fortunate person herself. According to them, we are deeply pitiable beings and, oh goodness, without any feelings of shame at all – to admit without a blush or a demur to be single. What kind of girls can they be?

In the Preanger there are a large number of Dutch-speaking educated women and girls. Most of those whom we got to know spoke Dutch with us because we did not know each other's language. It was very nice there, we were really able to meet in the most pleasant circumstances people of our own race and social position. The association was friendly, easy and unforced. Happy people full of laughter and playfulness – all of this was marvellous but then do not go further, do not penetrate any deeper, that would only bring disappointment, unfortunately. Despite their European education, their nice, pleasant little manners, they remained on one issue – and that not the least important – really, really Native in thought and attitudes as though they had never heard of different points of view – or learned any! Those young people in that progressive region had free choice in regard to marriage – bravo, wonderful! – but then European-educated, refined girls do

[108] The idea of having 'live exhibits' was well established in the World Exhibitions in Europe, including at the 1898 and the then recent 1900 Paris Exhibition. Abendanon was planning a Javanese craft exhibition, as a means of promoting support for developing a craft market as the basis for stimulating 'native welfare'. He later developed this into a broader plan to develop native economy set out in an official report in 1904.

not hesitate and see no problem in marrying a man who is married – who has a wife, often wives and children. Oh, that disappointed us so much about those nice, dear ladies.

What I saw and heard there in the Sunda lands[109] confirmed me in my belief that intellectual development alone is not everything, that there must be another, higher development which must join with that other to bring mankind to what it must become. Besides the head, the heart must also be guided otherwise civilization will remain superficial.

Did you know that Yo and Mini, daughters of the Regent of Ciamis are getting married? It will be this month in fact – on the 15th and the 16th. Poor little Mini – she has other ideals! Her mother is apparently an extremely refined and cultured woman – and she is marrying off her 13-year-old child! I have noticed in the letters from her children that always mention her, that she is certainly not reticent when it comes to giving approval when something is wanted. I had tears of rage and regret and desperation in my eyes – and especially of sympathy for that poor child – when I read the announcement of the proposed marriage. Mini, that dear, wonderful child, who had such a promising future – marrying – that young thing! Oh, I still cannot imagine it! It is outrageous!! Oh, do not create illusions which must be destroyed – do not encourage dreams, when one knows beforehand that rude awakening must follow. It is cruel – so cruel!

Oh, how I desperately, desperately wish I had full command over just one language, my own or otherwise Dutch, to be able to set out thoroughly what I think and feel about so many things which set my imagination on fire, that fill me with indignation, such as those dreadful things my countrymen so admire and are so attached to – justified by men out of egotism, by women from a sense of powerlessness and from ignorance. I have some sharp and biting thoughts about 'Ideals', sometimes my fingers are itching to write down these thoughts not just for myself and my intimate friends, but also to throw them in the face of others. But what would be the use? People would just shrug their shoulders, others, just laugh and most would take no notice. Gibberish from an idiot or madman!

Perhaps it is better this way, that I do not have the language completely at my command to do with what I wish. Who knows what evil might flow from the pen of this inexperienced, impractical hothead instead of good! In any case, to have full command of a language now would not be much use to me because I must not speak my thoughts aloud.

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[109] The Sundanese people of West Java. See also letter to Nellie van Kol, August 1901.

After the disappointment, now a refreshment, which will certainly please you as well. Among the newly appointed Regents of East Java there is one who gained his education in Europe, spent 8 years in Holl. He is a school friend of Heer Quartero, which is the reason why we have heard a lot about him. He is the oldest son of a Regent – would have studied law but his father died, and a younger son was appointed Regent in his stead – his studies in consequence suffered. He returned to Java, disillusioned, embittered, had great difficulty fitting back into Native life, did nothing for 4 years. Poor man, what he had regarded as ideals in his youth, he now referred to as problems. But, from a letter of his which Mevrouw Q. gave me to read, I could see that not all the tendencies towards poetry and idealism had been killed off.[110]

The Q.'s, with ulterior motives, invited him here, he had to meet his sisters but these ungrateful wretches ridiculed the idea. From his photograph he looks a good-natured fellow. 'Certainly old on the outside, but young at heart!' affirmed Heer Q. Now we believe it!

Recently the Q.'s were with us together with another controleur. The gentlemen were talking about this Regent whom the other controleur knew well. 'An extremely cultivated man', we heard him say, and a little later:

> No, he is not married, that is to say, he is married to someone whom he cannot present in public, she is an ordinary woman of the people with whom he has had several children. He does not intend marrying again, he does not want to marry a Raden Ayu, because he would then have to send the other away or make her take an inferior position. In either case he would cause her sorrow and this he does not wish to do.

My heart sprang open when I heard this; so there is such a man!

Beautiful, don't you think? Mevr. Q told us later that when she heard it she, and also her husband, threw a quick glance at us, both thinking the same thing: 'Had the girls heard this? How he will rise in their estimation!' And so it is. We fervently hope that the Regent will remain true to himself and allow nothing to distract him from his beautiful resolve.

It will be a great pleasure for us later to make his acquaintance, we hope it will happen.

The younger generation, regardless of their sex, must associate with each other. Individuals can do something by themselves to raise the development of our people, but if we were to come together, unite our energies, work together, then we could work more profitably. In unity there is strength and power.

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[110] It is not clear who this was a reference to.

Oh, how I have been carrying on again. What an illusion! Come, this letter must be brought to an end – but not before offering Mijnheer our very best wishes and asking you to pass on to him our warmest regards.

With a fond kiss I take my leave
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

7 October 1901

Dear Mevrouw, Annie arrived here a little while ago – she is just now in another room making music with the sisters – and speaking about this and that all of a sudden she said enthusiastically: 'You know, this morning a luminous idea suddenly came to me – would you like to learn French? Go on, we could do it together, that would be such fun!'

We then told her about that idea of yours and she will help us with the greatest pleasure! Wonderful! Wonderful! She has many of her textbooks with her, will soon begin unpacking her case of books to see what she has and what we can use. Everything she has we can borrow, and we will give you the titles of what she does not have. We accept your kind offer eagerly and with a heart full of gratitude.

I am writing this on my lap, a rug around my legs. 'Silly excited creature,' you will no doubt be saying, 'it could have waited until tomorrow!' Yes, but I wanted to give you this news about which we are all so overjoyed as soon as possible. We are so pleased and happy as we have not been for a long time! What an excitement, we do not seem to be able to outgrow this. Some time ago, an acquaintance of ours said we were like the mountains of Java, apparently calm and peaceful, but inside the lava is glowing!

This morning the fever was trying hard to overpower me but I was too clever for it. Although I am now sitting under a warm blanket, I do not feel at all ill. Those dear parents of ours were of course concerned about me this morning but I laughed off their anxiety.

Father and the sisters are well, thank God, and one can no longer tell that [Kar]tinah has been very ill, but our poor fragile Kleintje still looks extremely pale and is still quite weak. Poor dear, what a lot of weight she has lost, fortunately she is now a little more reasonable and will drink milk, eat eggs, etc.

Please ignore the messy writing, and excuse me for writing in pencil.

The Dutch translation of Escuelcios?[111] Yes, with pleasure! We don't know it – you are very, very kind.

How are you both? Does Mijnheer, as we fervently hope, continue to make progress? 'Night now, my own dearest. Warmest greetings to Mijnheer and for you a kiss from the sisters and from

Your own foolish girl
Kartini

To Stella Zeehandelaar

11 October 1901

And now dear friend, I am going to reveal something of our plans to you, naturally in complete confidence. The avenues open to us to ensure our independent existence and, at the same time, to be of use to our fellow human beings are: doctor, midwife, teacher, writer, artist. Other paths are also still open to provide us with an independent existence, but they are not desired by us since there is no value for our compatriots associated with them. What use for instance would we be to our people as an apothecary's assistant, a bookkeeper, a telegraphist's clerk in some office or another, or some other such job? Such occupations and the life associated with them do not attract us. We want to ensure that if we gain an independent existence we will at the same time contribute to educating and uplifting our people. We want to have a rich and complete life.

You know that the Director of Education, Religion and Industry has presented a plan to the Government to establish a school for the daughters of the native nobility, and, by way of experiment, the establishment of a boarding school for the daughters of native nobility. When last year we heard from the Director in person about his wonderful plans, his wife asked whether I would like to become a teacher at that school. I replied that I would like that very much, but that I could not take on that task since I had not been trained for that job, and was not suited to it. Mevrouw then said that her husband wanted me as I was, to lead the youthful hearts and to form their characters. I had to be with the young children like an older sister, and be a model for them. A very honourable task, but was I not correct in refusing to take it on if I did not have the necessary qualifications? If I absolutely insisted on being trained for

[111] This is presumably a Spanish reference known to Rosa. It has not been possible to trace this reference.

it first, Mevrouw said, then I had better spend some time at the normal school in Batavia or elsewhere to study and gain qualifications, that was no problem. The question was, did I want to?[112]

You know already that my father was prepared to entertain the idea. I would go to Batavia where the directress of the girls' HBS, whom we had met and spoken to only once, would provide me with all the assistance and support I might need. This kind offer on the part of someone we hardly knew was very touching. That there was such a woman immediately available to support our cause encouraged me so much. Wonderful! Where would I receive better direction and help for my studies than from a woman who was the head of the HBS? Unexpectedly, and without looking for it, I was suddenly offered such excellent assistance. I was in the clouds with happiness and thought that my departure for Batavia would be merely a matter of weeks, at most, several months.

I have also already told you that we are definitely not well-off. Even though father has a large income, he also has a great many expenses so that we have only just enough if we live simply to provide for the boys – the boys must be looked after before anyone else – with a good education. I had given the financial question some consideration; it was for that reason that I had developed a plan so that, should the objection to my training as teacher become too great (this training would cost my father about 1200 guilders p.a., a month's income for Father, certainly no small matter in such a large household as ours) I would change direction and instead go to the school for the training of doctors in Batavia. To train as a doctor is free – that is, if you are a boy, there have never been female students.[113] The training to become a doctor is entirely financed by the Government. Students receive free board, a monthly subsidy to pay for the cost of food and clothing, and free medical treatment.

In Batavia I asked the Director of Education, under whose department's control the medical school resides, if girls were admitted. Mr Mijnh. A. has no objection, indeed applauds the idea, but of course, the female student would have to be an external student. My idea had been to ask the Government to admit me to the school for training doctors on precisely the same conditions and with the same privileges enjoyed by the male students. Since anyone with

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112 This sets out a justification for resiling from earlier plans to study in Europe with which Stella had been involved. Even here, Kartini's aims were clearly more ambitious than those her mentors had in mind. But Kartini concludes in reconfirming her desire to study in Europe.

113 At the time female students had only recently been accepted into medical schools in Europe.

some brains must recognize the value of having female doctors – especially to treat indigenous women who would rather die than be touched by a male doctor – and as the head of the Department of Education would enthusiastically support my application, there is every chance that the Government would consider it favourably.

I have been interested in this subject for a long time, only I do not like the long study associated with it. For someone not yet 20, I think 7 years of study is of no consequence, but for one past that age, then I think it is a long time. And then, as an adult woman, to spend one's days initially amongst boys of 13 to 18 and later, to be the only woman in a crowd of men, is not a very attractive idea. But these are only small objections that I could easily overlook.

But there is something else. Father and my friends are against the idea: fortunately not totally. Father, because I would be the only girl amongst all these men and boys – such a thing has never been seen here before – and my friends because I might not have the constitution to undertake such a study. Undoubtedly to be a doctor is a beautiful profession, but not a vocation to be undertaken by everyone: a strong determination and perseverance alone are not enough to undertake a training course to become a doctor; nerves of steel are also required. It is that which concerns my friends although it does not worry me. Father thinks teaching is by far the best plan for us, as do my friends in Batavia. They think this is just the right work for me where I would at least be in my element. And how could I better spread my ideas than as an educator of the younger generation, the women and mothers of the future. The future is in the hands of the children and in the arms of the mother lies the child – and the future.

As a writer, it would be possible to make a great contribution to the realization of my ideals and to work for the development and civilizing of our people; as a teacher, the sphere of influence would be smaller, but I would then be able to educate directly, and that smaller circle would, of course, be able to expand and in time attract imitators, at least if the model which was provided was good enough.

You know my love of literature and know that it is a dream of mine one day to become a notable exponent of literary art. But it is not possible to serve two masters at once, or at least I do not see the possibility of being a teacher, whose day is entirely taken up with children, and to simultaneously devote myself to writing (at least as I see this vocation not just as the development of mental ability, but also the formation of character). I want to do just one thing at a time, but that I want to do well. Entre ces deux mon coeur

balance,[114] Stella! As a doctor, I perhaps would not need to divorce myself from that beloved work: writing.

But I find teaching, the education of children entrusted in one's care, something so serious, holy even, that I would never be satisfied if, having devoted myself to it, I felt that I was not doing my job as well as I myself would expect from a good educator. As a teacher at a boarding school, I would have to be involved with the children all day; even during the evening and at night, I would not be free because the children would be entrusted to me. The trust such a position brings with it entails a great many duties. Perhaps you will think I am exaggerating, but I am convinced it would be a crime to devote myself to children, the bearers of the future, if I was not completely suited to such a position, which is in my opinion so sacred and noble. And no expression of satisfaction on the part of my superiors would make me content if that were not so.

The dream of my father is, if his little daughter absolutely wants to become something and insists on being useful to others, that I should become a principal of a girls' school. My parents share this dream. And you, Stella, what do you wish for me? What path would you like me to follow? Tell me honestly and directly; tell me your opinion unreservedly, I expect nothing else from you. You have always shown yourself to be an honest and well-intentioned friend. Be so now.

Another solution has revealed itself. A medical missionary who is not known to us, but who has a good name and established reputation, who has heard a lot about us from our friends, offered, on his own initiative, to train us without cost as midwives. Someone else has also offered us this opportunity. This has made us so grateful! You have perhaps heard or read of the large native Christian community of Mojowarno in the residency of Surabaya. In *Gemeentewerk in Indie*, the reports of the Congress of the Exhibition of Women's Work,[115] the names of that medical missionary and of Mojowarno are often mentioned. You have no doubt heard that midwives are desperately needed here in the Indies. Each year, 20,000 women die in childbirth, and 30,000 new born babies die on average in Java, or in the Neth. Indies as a whole, because of insufficient obstetric knowledge. In that area, therefore, there would be an extensive field of work for us to be a service to our nation.

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114 Kartini suggests she has difficulty choosing between these two 'second best' options.

115 This account of 'community work' in the Indies addressed the potential role for Dutch women in welfare work in Java. The extensive Christian mission in East Java included a technical school and hospital, the latter headed by missionary doctor, Dr Bervoets.

We are quite attracted to this field of work, but it would be less than honest if we were to say that becoming a midwife was a dream of ours. But rather, 1000 times sooner a midwife than to be dependent on relatives, not to mention a forced marriage.

Father has given us permission to go to Mojowarno to qualify as midwives if other avenues were to be closed to us. Our relatives are furiously against the idea; they consider such work too lowly for our aristocratic hands. Our friends would also regret it if we had to take up this option, but their reasons are very much more noble, oh, infinitely of a higher plane. They would find it so difficult for us knowing we had other dreams. In principle, they are not against us going to Mojowarno, they consider that work noble and honourable. But could we thereby achieve our goal of informing others and setting an example by this means? If, in civilized Europe, the vocation of midwife is still more or less looked down upon, could the Indies, the Indies that is so completely taken up by all that glitters and sparkles, be able to appreciate that work? It would see only its lowly status: anything which is not of high-standing or which does not sparkle or exude an air of importance, my poor country does not consider worth looking at.

You understand, of course, we, ourselves, would not care a jot for such contempt, but the consequences we cannot ignore. We want to open the way for achieving the freedom and emancipation for the Javanese woman! The model that we provide must be able to be followed by others. And something that is looked down on with contempt will not find a following. If we want others to follow in our footsteps, then the example that we provide should be something that speaks to the people, that attracts interest and encourages imitation. In this matter, therefore, we cannot just consider our own desires, but must take account of the nature of the people for whom we wish to lead the way and act as a model.

Recently in Holland, and more especially in Den Haag, a movement has begun to revive the arts of the Indies, which have fallen into neglect. The association, Oost en West, an outgrowth of the Exhibition of Women's Work about which you have no doubt already heard and read, has, as its main aim, the promotion of the interests of the people of the Indies and has a sub-committee concerned with the arts which includes a number of prominent artists.

The arts committee intends to send a male or female artist (specializing in the expressive arts) to the Indies to encourage art in the Indies in general, and batik art in particular, to purify it of its foreign influences, such as European influences, which are causing its decline. Interest in Holland for the arts of the Indies was awakened by the very successful exhibition of Indies arts held

by Oost en West. Also, outside Holland, the arts of the Indies, and especially batik craft, are becoming known.

I think I have already told you that Roekmini has a lot of talent and also an ability for drawing, and that it is her dearest wish to become a painter. For this, training in Europe is essential, but this is unfortunately out of reach! At least it would be beyond our means to enable our sister to realize her dreams. You can now guess the direction of our thoughts. We want to communicate with Oost en West to try to get the association to help Roekmini realise her desires; to have Oost en West either directly or indirectly make it possible that she can attend a drawing and painting academy so that later, in Java, she could devote herself entirely to her art. Who would be of greater assistance to the development of Javanese art than a child of the people itself, where love for native art is inherited from birth and not learned? As a child of the Javanese nation herself, Roekmini would have access anywhere, where Europeans, no matter how well intentioned towards the Javanese, would find a closed door. We know several people in the committee of Oost en West, and in the arts sub-committee of the organization. [116]

If our efforts are shipwrecked, then R. would like to become an accoucheuse. She wants to become either a painter or an accoucheuse, but whatever it is, she wants to do it well. For that reason, if fate directs her to become an accoucheuse as her means of existence, and also as a way of being useful for society, she wants to make the effort to obtain training for that vocation in Europe. In Holland, she could become completely qualified in obstetrics and be of great assistance to mothers here when she finished her studies.

Doctors here could only train her to be a midwife who would need to work under the supervision of a doctor. And it would make a lot of difference to the people, who, unfortunately, are not impressed by high ideals and progressive ideas, who only worship sparkle and glitter, whether she is trained here or in Europe to become qualified as an accoucheuse. Once having obtained a diploma in Europe, she would not be looked down upon, and her example would undoubtedly be followed. We want to get the Government to meet the cost of her going to Holland to undertake training in obstetrics. To this end, we want to enlist the help of Prof. Hector Treub[117] in Amsterdam and Dr Shatz[118] in Den Haag; men who have already often entered the lists in demanding

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116 After Kartini's marriage, it was Roekmini who maintained the Jepara school from 1903 till 1905. She later qualified as a Fröbel teacher.

117 Hector Treub (1856–1920), professor of obstetrics at Amsterdam University, established the first women's clinic in the Netherlands. He advocated women's education and contraception. He published primers on gynecology (1892) and obstetrics (1898).

118 This person could not be identified.

improvements in obstetrics in the Indies, as a result of which thousands die unnecessarily. The attention of Parliament has also been directed to this question by van Kol, if I am not mistaken. This parliamentarian is coming to the Indies. I hope to meet him and get to speak with him. My brother knows him very well.[119]

The Government in the Indies has already taken measures to improve this terrible situation. All doctors in Java who want to undertake the training of midwives of any women who apply receive from the Government a monthly subsidy. The women receive a subsidy during their training to meet the costs of accommodation etc. and, after an examination, they are paid by the state.

The plan of sister R. is, when she has completed her study of obstetrics in Europe, to set up a training course for the profession in Java. No criticism is intended of the ability of doctors who now undertake this, but what value is expertise in the subject being taught if one is not able to be properly understood by the students because teacher and student speak different languages? Almost without exception, doctors here are unable to speak the national language. Doctors use Malay language in speaking with ordinary people, and then usually very badly. Almost no doctor speaks Javanese. Very few ordinary Javanese speak or understand Malay. Can you see now what an impossible task it is for doctors to make themselves understood in broken Malay to their students, women and girls of the people, who have no education at all, and who, apart from their mother tongue, can speak no other language? These difficulties would disappear if someone who is in complete command of native languages undertakes the task of training native women as midwives.

R.'s status could also contribute to the success of the enterprise. Natives are very attached to their nobility and what flows down from the nobility, whom they respect so much, would be readily accepted.[120]

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

18 October 1901

My own dearest Mevrouw, the day before yesterday, just on the eve of the departure of the Staal family,[121] we received their kind farewell greeting and

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119 See below, Kartini to Stella, 17 May 1902.

120 This letter was completed on 24 October – see below.

121 Colonel Staal (1845–1920) was attached to the Governor General's entourage. Kartini had met him and his wife in Batavia in 1900. See also Kartini to Mev. Abendanon-Mandri, 24 September 1900.

immediately my thoughts carried me to you, you who will lose so much with their departure. My thoughts have been with you constantly – sadness filled my soul, sadness about your suffering, sadness about my total powerlessness to comfort you and cheer up my most treasured Friend. I would have reached for my pen immediately even if I could not have comforted you, to at least have told you how very much it pained me that your best friend was going so very far away from you, had it not been for the sad circumstances in my own situation which forced me to busy myself with other things.

I can so completely put myself in your shoes now, my dearest. I also, have known and experienced that deeply lacerating grief of separation from people who have become part of my heart, inseparable parts of our lives. No words, however sincere and deeply felt, can, initially, soften the pain; only Time, that great healer, is able to bring a balm to the wounds. But it is comforting, is it not, in days of sadness to receive words of friendship and love from people who one knows are fond of us and to whom we ourselves are not indifferent. In my thoughts I quietly take your hands in the both of mine and press them softly. Look into my eyes dear, and see if there is not a world of love looking back at you! I am so fond of you, so infinitely fond of you, my dear, dear Angel! Your happiness is my happiness, and your suffering, my suffering. There will not be anyone who can make up for the loss of your best Friend, but it is possible for other friends who truly and deeply love you, to help lighten your suffering.

I fully realized that the departure of Mevrouw Staal affects you more severely since it is just at this time that you are experiencing such concern and anxiety about those who are most dear to you on this earth. It will be the same for Mevrouw Staal. Your Friend would no doubt have left the Land of the Sun with a much less heavy heart had Her Ladyship known that those she had left behind, those beloved ones, were without cares and sorrows. Sometimes in life it can be as if everything is working to break our spirit. Everything comes at once, and storms break with a thunderous crash all around us, the wrath of the hurricane seems to say: 'Down, you miserable wretch, down, in the dust!' Only the strong in heart and spirit are able to withstand such storms to offer resistance to both the cruelty and harshness of the powers of the world.

It seems to me that it is just those that are strong in heart and spirit who are most sought out by what one calls Fate. Oh, for shame, how sombre – that must be because I have seen and experienced so much misery in recent times. Oh, miserable worm that I am – who trembles and shakes when it feels merely the approach of the rod – how can I bring comfort and cheer?

In the newspaper I saw that you both will be spending another month in the fresh climate of the Preanger.[122] We are very happy for you because you do like it there, don't you? The extension of leave is not because Mijnheer feels less well again is it? It is not is it? I sincerely hope it is only to bring Mijnheer completely back to his old self. Where are you now? In Bandung or at Sindanglaya[123] already? No, don't write to me, not until your heart is totally at peace and without worry. But I may continue to write to you may I not, at least, if I am able?

We have again experienced the most terrible days. After me R. became ill last Tuesday – malaria and a cold. She had a constant temperature and ached in all her limbs – then on Saturday something further was added to it, which placed the poor child in great danger and caused her great suffering. Such wretchedness I hope never to see again in my life, I would not wish it on my archenemy if I had one. How we survived that day, I do not know, it was just terrible. By evening the danger had finally receded, you can imagine how grateful and relieved we were. However the illness entered a different phase, sister suffered from total insomnia, for 48 hours she was unable to sleep, not even doze. Monday morning while Father was in Semarang on business and Ma and I were alone with her, she suddenly took a turn for the worse, she became very tight in the chest – at one moment it appeared she might suffocate. We were at our wits' end – the doctor was not in residence. The cold that she had contracted during K[ardinah]'s illness had avenged itself on her carelessness. It was just tragic how my poor sister had to suffer. Now, thank God, she is improving. She has been terribly weakened, there were days during which she was unable to move without assistance. Last night she was finally able to sleep peacefully, she only woke several times and then fell back to sleep again immediately. This morning she surprised and gladdened us by sitting up without assistance and getting out of bed and walking a little way.

Poor thing, just imagine, swollen spleen, biliousness and a heavy cold and a gall bladder attack. All this because of exhaustion, said the doctor. Today she is continuously hungry, so her stomach is in order again although she has to maintain her diet. Because of our concern and all the confusion created by the dangerous condition of R. we paid little attention to K[ardinah] on Saturday. Hearing her sister groaning and moaning so terribly, she crept into the sick room, regarded the situation and while she was briefly alone with the patient she helped her sit up. K. immediately developed a pain in her head, and that

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122 The mountainous area of the Preanger in West Java was a popular retreat for Europeans working in the capital.

123 Sindanglaya was a popular resort in mountains beyond Buitenzorg (Bogor).

very day developed a temperature, fortunately she has became more sensible and allowed herself to be nursed. She recovered after two days of heavy fever. Now she is up and about again, is already walking small distances in the house without becoming immediately exhausted as she was in the beginning. This morning we brought R. to the window, my poor little girl longed so for the sun and the blue sky. If it is not windy tomorrow she will be allowed to sit outside for a little while.

Poor dear Mama, how sorry I feel for her, days on end of waiting with no rest and having to live in such an atmosphere! Oh but R. is such a tiresome patient, at least 10 times as difficult as K. who certainly is not easy. I had not expected it.

With me all is well – I was only in bed ill for one day, I have now completely recovered, only feel very tired from all that night duty. When our patients no longer need nursing and I have caught up on my sleep, I will immediately begin a long letter to you that I have had in mind for a long time. You will then also be in more of a mood to lend an ear to the chatter of your foolish, excited daughter – at least I hope so – otherwise the letter had better stay in the ink container and the paper folder for the time being.

Sometimes I so long for you dearest – oh, how small I feel on these occasions – I am jealous of everyone, envy everything which comes into contact with you – I even envy the wind, that he is able to freely caress your face, play with your hair. Don't you think this foolish and terrible of me? Oh, I cannot bear to think that, most likely, we will have seen you in Batavia for the last time! No. It is not true. We will see each other again, yes?

You may not leave our country before we have seen you once more – and before … before you have seen the threesome happy and that we have really conquered that which wants to keep us down in the dust – and wants to make dumb, soulless objects of us. But that they will not be able to do – they can break your girls, but not bend them. With the support of you both we must get there.

There are 3 young hearts which beat for you, hearts which you have tied to yours, these hearts have entrusted themselves to you! You will never leave them, never, will you? Even should the distance that in fact separates us, becomes so great that the fastest steamer would take weeks to bridge it? About that time – which must come one day – we prefer not to think. We cannot bear the thought that one day you will be unreachable, far from us. R. and K. have decided not to make any new friendships – after you they want to love no one else. My foolish little girls, how can one know this in advance, have control over one's heart? Love and sympathy come unannounced, lay hold of the poor heart without asking whether one is wanted or not.

But now I take my leave of you dearest, hoping that these lines will find you both in good health. All our love and warmest greetings from everyone here to you both – and a hearty kiss on both your cheeks from

Your own
Kartini

Stella Zeehandelaar

24 October
(continuation of letter of 11 October 1901)

Precisely two weeks after leaving off writing this letter, I resume writing. The card I sent off in the meantime would have brought you up to date with the wretched circumstances in which we found ourselves, and which have now, fortunately, passed. As you already know, R. has been seriously ill; twice her life has hung by a thread but now, thank God, she has recovered and is improving daily – today she even went outside. I cannot express how grateful and happy we are that all has ended well. Our sister Kardinah has also recovered. She can now undertake a walk of a quarter of an hour, and is gaining colour in her arms and cheeks. We certainly had our fair share of suffering.

Everywhere at the moment it is very unhealthy because of the dry weather. Poor country, apart from serious illness, what else are you suffering from? Due to the severe drought, almost everywhere in the country there have been failed harvests. In neighbouring Grobogan it is worst. There people are starving, and in Demak, where 26,000 bouw of sawah failed[124] and where, as well, there is a cholera epidemic, people are intently awaiting the coming West monsoon which each year places the district under water. Poor country that suffers drought during the East monsoon and drowns during the real monsoon because of floods. But, I had better not write any more about that misery, rather, I should continue my conversation of 14 days ago.

Sister Kardinah also wants to be educated, and has chosen as her area home economics and cooking. Our plan is always to stay together and to work together toward our social goal: the education of our people. If Fate is kind to us we would like to open a school together which would offer subjects in

[124] This severe situation attracted widespread criticism of colonial administration and occasioned an important colonial report by the resident of Semarang in 1902. It was one of the circumstances that motivated the colonial government's enquiry into the welfare of the Javanese, the *Mindere Welvaart Onderzoek*, 1904–14. See above Kartini to Adriani 10 August 1901.

elementary and higher elementary education in needlework, home economics, and related subjects as well as an associated course either in the arts (batik, drawing, etc.) or in midwifery.

Only in Holland can one gain a qualification in home economics and cooking – no opportunity exists for that here. Kleintje's forte actually is music, and her dearest wish was and remains to concentrate on music but this is completely impossible for her. And my little girl has set aside her dream; if she can only realize her other goal she would be happy. She so much wants to make a contribution to the advancement of our people. And as a teacher of home economics she could do such a lot. More and more it is becoming apparent that the Government would like to train the people to be thrifty.

And where the management of the house is in the hands of the woman it is self-evident, if one wants to make the people thrifty, one needs to begin with the women. What is the use of teaching this virtue to men if their housekeepers do not know the value of money? This will be the argument which we shall advance when we request the government to provide Kleintje with the opportunity to train as a teacher in Domestic Economy in order to later establish a course in this subject. My little sister wants to take upon herself the great task of teaching women and mothers of the future in Java the value of thriftiness and of money.[125] As for me, I could do it here, that is gain qualifications, but a training in Europe is always preferable to one in the Indies because of the general education one gains and the broadening of one's horizons, and so on.

In recent times especially, the Government has been giving clear indications of wanting to nurture a culture of education amongst its officials. This, for instance, is very evident in the most recent appointments of Regents, where the Government chose two persons who, according to existing regulations (the system where the son follows father, or, if no suitable son is available, then another member of the family of the last Regent is selected) were not eligible, and who were not related to the Regents and yet succeeded in being appointed. But these recently appointed Regents are very well educated, and received their education in Europe.

From everything, it seems that the Government is serious in its intention to educate and develop the Indies, to provide the Javanese people in general, and in particular the native nobility from whom the majority of the civil service

[125] In 1916 Kardinah as Raden Ayu of Tegal, opened a domestic economy school for girls where these subjects were taught for which she designed the curriculum and wrote home economics and cookery textbooks.

is recruited, what it needs in terms of knowledge and development.[126] Mijn. Abendanon rightly said: 'It is obvious that the intellectual development of native society will not advance dramatically if the woman is left behind in the process. It is always the case that the woman has been shown to be an important factor in the civilization of a people'.[127] Most Natives are against sending their daughters to school because men are the teachers. Women teachers must be provided.

About fifteen years ago, the Netherlands Indies Government sent four native young people at Government expense to Holland to be trained as teachers by a young qualified instructor. The impetus for them to go to Holland, to gain a qualification there in order, later, to return to the Indies better-qualified than if they had trained here so they could contribute to the uplifting of their countrymen, did not come from themselves but from someone for whom the development of the Indies was a matter very close to his heart.[128] The situation with us is quite different. In our case, there is a drive, a longing for the light that comes from a deeply rooted conviction derived from our own suffering, from sympathy and feeling for the suffering of others, and from reflection.

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We are merely awaiting Father's permission before carrying out our plans. Forgive a father, Stella, that he hesitates to hand his children over to an uncertain future. As pioneers, we have to fight and overcome all opposition and prejudice and it is certain that this will not happen without disappointment and sorrow. And what parents would not gladly save their children from suffering, what parents would not regard with a heavy and anxious heart the difficult life, full of struggle and disappointment which is the fate of all pioneers?

I don't know whether I will go to Holland to study if the opportunity were provided. It has always been a dream of mine, and it still is, to study in Holland. Last year, when the idea was mentioned that I might study here, I opposed it tooth and nail. If I were to study, I want to study properly which I could only do either in Holland or in Batavia. Holland is out of my reach if I have to do it by my own means and, therefore, I set my heart

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126 This appears to be a reference to the announcement of the 'ethical policy' at the opening of the new Dutch parliament on 17 September 1901.

127 This was a reference to Abendanon's initial memorandum on the need for training women teachers.

128 See further below, Kartini's letter 2 December 1901.

on Batavia. I could not study properly at home; that is to say, I would not be able to devote myself entirely to my study which, given my age, would be essential. Household and social duties would keep me too much from my work. It would be impossible for me to avoid these duties if I were at home. For that reason, I put my foot down. But that was last year, when my Father was strong and healthy; now Father is no longer in such good health unfortunately.

Forgive a daughter, Stella, if when she should be offered the opportunity to fulfil her heart's dearest wish, one that in the future could be of benefit to others, she refuses it because her heart could not separate from her Father who throughout her life had devoted himself to her; who has him to thank for everything she had become, a father suffering from poor health, who now more than ever needs her devotion and love.

Stella, I am a child, I am a daughter, not only a woman who with heart and soul wishes to devote herself totally to a beautiful and great task which will be of benefit and a blessing to many. I am also a child attached by the most intimate bonds of tender love and deepest gratitude to an old grey Father, worn old and grey by worry about his children and whose favorite I may be, because we think and feel so much alike. Stella, you who know my great love for him, and as well, my love for what I regard as our calling and my deep attachment to my sisters, you will understand what a severe conflict I would have if I should be confronted by a choice: my father and separation from my sisters and, to a large extent, rejection of my vocation or, separation from my father, unity with my sisters, and total devotion to our calling!

These days Father is weak, often needs nursing, and constant attention; my first duty is to devote myself to him. You may think it of little importance?, Stella, but I would not have a moment's rest if, in answer to my calling and far from my Father, I knew he was suffering and in need of assistance! The work to which we are called is beautiful and noble: to devote ourselves to matters of great importance, to work towards the raising of the oppressed native women of the native people, in short, to be of consequence for society, to work for history … but then I could never answer to my conscience if, having given myself to others, I allowed my poor old father, who after all has the first rights to me, to suffer and struggle alone while he needed me.

One of the ideas which I would like to encourage people to have is: respect for everything that lives, for the rights of all, for the feelings of all; to feel ashamed to cause another even the slightest pain without having been compelled to it; to recognize the importance to save our fellow human beings from as much suffering as possible. I would like to help beautify their ideas; and to

convince them that there is a noble and holy duty named gratitude. Could I introduce such ideas to my people if I, who pronounce them, ignore them in practice?

I must not lose sight of my duty as a child, nor those duties that I need to fulfil towards myself, especially if my fulfilment affects not just my own happiness but also the wellbeing of others. The issue now is how I can harmonize these two great duties that I have to fulfil and which are precisely diametrically opposed to each other?

The solution to this problem is, for the time being, to devote myself to my father and at the same time to pursue my studies. I will study here at home for the vocation of teacher in as far as one is able to do this by self-education supported only by strong will and perseverance. To gain the teaching qualification, one must have first gained the preliminary qualification for assistant as well as to be able to show evidence that one has taught for two years. I had been thinking about this for a long time but Mevrouw Abendanon decided for me when she made the suggestion some time ago: while waiting to see what fearful Fate would bring us, we three will study on our own. No matter what vocation Fate will indicate to the sisters, whatever is learnt will always be of value.

For the last two months we have had a lady teacher here in town in whom we have discovered a dear and warm friend. She is still very young, a fine, upright person who has left home and country to earn her living here. She is often at our house. When I told her of our plan she was immediately prepared to help us with everything that she could. Apart from the qualification as teacher assistant, she also has a qualification to teach French. She immediately made inquiries regarding the books being used at the normal school in Surabaya and Batavia for the assistant teacher diploma course. We can use any of the books she has and what she doesn't have we can get from the A[bendanon] family.

Later I also want to take an examination in Native languages, Javanese and Malay. It is a pity that that terrible illness intervened, otherwise we would by now have been well advanced; obviously, during all that time, I was unable to take up a book. Annie Glaser, that is the teacher, will soon leave the hotel and move in with a family near here. As soon as she is organized she will set us, or me, to work. My poor sisters are not allowed to do anything yet, and in particular must have no mental strain. They feel terrible doing nothing but hands and heads are still very tired.

What do you think of these high-flown plans? As long as you don't say, 'Dear, oh dear! They are up in the clouds!' then I'll be content.

Do you know what I have noticed about many of my friends? That they have too high an opinion of us. They ascribe to us talents and gifts that we do

not possess. Sometimes we have to laugh about their enthusiasm. The proverb, 'Love is either blind or blinded' is applicable here. You should hear what they consider us capable of. We feel our limitations very strongly when our friends set us up on a pedestal; we feel very small but also grateful for the love from which it derives. A friend of ours would like to see that I used my writing to contribute to the improvement of our people. I should establish a journal or something devoted to the interests of the people and make that the focus of editorial direction; or that I should become a contributor to one of the leading dailies or journals and write at length, enough to shock those who are still asleep!!! Was I correct in saying that the proverb 'Love blinds' is relevant?

When I have the assistant teacher qualification I have to leave home both to study for the main qualification and in order to teach. The convent school in Batavia provides an opportunity to do this. There one can teach the subjects of the elementary curriculum and in return one gets free instruction for the diploma as well as free accommodation, laundry and medical treatment. But that is still some time off; first I have to pass the assistant's exam and then we will see.

It is an unpleasant idea to have to separate from the sisters; they think it is terrible and for me it is no less so. Especially if they are given permission to do what they have requested, they will be so far away from us and in a totally foreign country. Fortunately they will have a brother there who, just like me, dearly loves our sisters. This brother is completely, intellectually and emotionally, in support of our ideas which echo his own.[129] We have sealed a bond with him that when he has finished his study he will join us to work together for the realization of our shared ideals![130]

It is wonderful the way he shares the ideas of his sisters and empathizes with them. This kind of thing inspires us, lifts us up and pushes us forward in the same way as your support for us and your interest in us does. There is another young person, a European, who only knows us through his mother, our friend, who is also a great supporter of our cause, and takes a vivid interest in it.[131] The strong support and interest of our friends, known and unknown, are a great comfort to us. We have such need for this moral support. Will you always give us this, Stella?

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129 This implies a considerable sacrifice on Kartini's part since it assumes that her sisters would continue the plan of studying in the Netherlands while Kartini stayed behind. It also ignores the marriage arranged for Kardinah, confirmed in the following letter.

130 By this time, Kartono, who commenced his studies in the Netherlands at the Delft Institute of Technology, had transferred to Leiden University. He did not return till 1925.

131 This is a reference to EC Abendanon.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

20 November 1901

Hello dearest Mevrouw, how are you? I sincerely hope everything is all right and that both of you are in good health, at peace and happy. You have returned to Batavia and has Mijnheer returned to work? Oh I hope so fervently that all suffering is now behind you and that all anxiety and worry has left you. Now you will no doubt soon send me the satin for the jewelry box? The carving is finished, I hope you will be as pleased with it as we are. I am already longing to begin lining it and thank you again for letting me do it. I am certain I will work on it with pleasure.

It is shameful that, despite my promise to write to you again soon after my last letter, you have had no word from me for so long. One should really never promise anything, unless it be to oneself because one can never know beforehand what will happen. Then one could save others many disappointments. However sincerely the promise may have been meant, and however sincere the intention to fulfil it, there may be unforeseen circumstances such as illness that may make the fulfilment of one's promises impossible. Amongst us Javanese there is a belief that he who does not fulfil a promise will be pursued by an ular weling (poisonous snake). The snake reminds one of the promise, if it is not quickly carried out then he will be visited by the snake again, this time by an ular weling whose bite is deadly. Should this happen then it is inadvisable to delay any longer in fulfilling one's promise, the person who has made the promise will have an accident. This relates only to promises to holy spirits, for instance, if one promises flowers, incense or a selamatan, etc. to holy ancestors. The snakes are sent by them to remind the human being of his promise. But why am I telling you this Javanese belief? Forgive me, it just came to me while writing.

I certainly do deserve a reprimand for my long silence because it was mainly due to indolence. I am not at all pleased with myself! How did I become so extremely lazy and enervated? I do not understand it myself. I only know that for some time I have not been feeling very well. Languid, listless, dull and tired. Nonsense! Hypochondria! – there! I will just have to get down to it and work and work hard. But that is just the point. I need work, work that I enjoy. And that is where my stupidity comes in: because I cannot have what I want, I turn my back against everything else – and worry about it. That is weakness, a great weakness!

Oh, that daily recurring, debilitating struggle, that is so wearying. I can better endure the rod than that constant pin-pricking. And then, I have seen

and experienced so much misery in recent times. My nerves are on edge, the doctor also says: work. My fiery temperament is playing tricks on me; I can put nothing out of my mind once I have it in my head – and must think about it continuously.

This letter will no doubt be another whine. In what mood will it find you? Oh forgive me if it merely increases your melancholy.

Dearest, I have tragic tidings to bring you. Last week mama came to tell me – oh, I can hardly write it down, my heart hurts so: the marriage will take place at the end of January or beginning February. A letter has arrived from the parents of the man requesting that the appropriate day be determined. And it is asked of me that I subdue our poor little one, to convince her to accept the marriage. You can imagine what went on inside me when I heard all this. Oh, and to think that it had been promised us, that we had been assured it would not take place – and now! And the poor child still knows nothing! I … I must prepare her for it, convince her to accept it, subdue her.

People continue to be under the misapprehension that I am the pitiable one because I am not Fortune's chosen one and that she is the lucky one because such a treasure has been thrown in her lap – I resist it with distaste and she does not want it because she wants to spare me a humiliation! Oh, what a bitter realization that just those who should know us best, know so little about us!

I told Mama everything that was on my mind. I kept thinking of what you both had said: 'Be gentle'. As much as I could I avoided mentioning points that would have hurt Mama. Mama said my arguments were false and ended up declaring that she did not understand me and that I should go to speak to Father myself. But, if I really loved my Father I would not do so because, for reasons of his health, he should not be involved. Mama told me why he had become so ill, this matter and our plans were the cause of Father's worrying condition in April. Truth for a truth: I told Mama what had brought Kleintje to the edge of the grave. I told her what we had been promised, already last year. I told her everything, everything, and taunted Mama to show me how what we wished and longed for was evil.

No, she could not call it 'evil' but she preferred the old, well-trodden ways. Her biggest dream is and remains that we will marry (!), become a person! Someone who does not marry is not a person! A woman who does not marry only does so from vanity because she wants to be admired, and to play coquette before others. The youngest sisters could study for whatever they wanted – we older ones had to marry. I am too old to study and the sisters are considered too insignificant to study. Should I persist in my view – fine, I will not listen

to reason anyway but the sisters may not. The key word was expressed: 'were I not there, the sisters would not be as they are.' I have no heart, am without feeling! I was reproached for my insensitivity. Do they know what love is? Love is certainly not forcing a soul given to one's care to do something which it loathes.

That afternoon my brother was sent in to me with the same message: I had to convince my sister. If I told her she would undoubtedly do it. And there it was: she will not do it out of shame for me; because I think this way, she does. It is fortunate the poor child did not hear it. What do they know about her? What do they know about her beautiful soul, of her proud nature and her talents? I also told him everything – including our plans, ideas! All were declared impossible! It is not right for the daughter of a Regent to go out to work – but it is all right for the daughter of a Regent to be placed on a platter and to be passed around to potential admirers.

But how could we possibly expect support from him who himself will contribute in maintaining the institutions so cruel to women? He is also of the opinion that I am against it because it is not I, but my sister who is the lucky one. Examples were provided of daughters of Regents who married before their older sisters. They cannot recognize that it would be a delight for me to prepare my darling as a bride for a respected and loved bridegroom!

Speaking of our plans for the future I was told that I should not forget that I was a Javanese, not a European woman. I could adopt European values as long as these did not conflict with our adat. But I have learned 3 things from Europeans – love, sympathy and the concept of justice, and I want to live according to these.

Father has a heart disease and cannot be involved and our little one has a weak constitution and must also not be troubled. I love both utterly, utterly – I cannot do without either. And Mevrouw, they have given me a choice between the two! Were Father not so weak and had he not such a serious illness, then we would know what to do – the world is big enough – but now? In August I spoke to Father about our plans and asked him what his attitude was; it could not remain like this, every day, every hour was a loss for us. Father held me in his arms and pressed me against his heart, again with a look in his eyes that expressed a world of sorrow but my ears heard no refusal. That very evening Father became ill and suffered from all kinds of things until September. Do you understand how terribly difficult it is being made for us? Oh, my poor, poor, Father. What Destiny has given you such daughters? Poor everybody, I cannot give in, no, I cannot! And then – what

then? Everyone, the whole family will curse me but I cannot do otherwise – nor can my sisters.

Without our Father's permission, Mojowarno is closed to us!

Oh my poor people, who only honour show and glitter and despise all that has no status or which does not sparkle! It could only be something spectacular which could reconcile them to our unacceptable behaviour. From where do we get that something spectacular?

Dear, dear Mevrouw, how it will grieve you to hear all this sad news. Your friendship with the Javanese girls has thus far brought you nothing but grief. Do not worry about us dearest, we know, and we are grateful for the fact that if you could help us you would have helped us. Support us now with your love, your faith in us – and if you can with comfort and cheering words. Do you remember that I once said to you that the thought of you both would be a beacon for us should life take us through valleys of darkness. The day before yesterday the sisters and I talked about you both, about those glorious days when the love of a noble soul surrounded us so intimately – and truly it became light inside me. A great feeling of tenderness came over me, my heart filled with gratitude. That also exists on this earth!

For a long time we have intended to ask the Government to provide us with free training for some kind of vocation. It was about this that I spoke to Father in August. Should the petition be refused then we want to communicate directly – privately – with the Queen and should this also be refused, well, there will always be some work for willing hands, even if it should not be suited to our character or talents.

Everyone is already well aware of the marriage plans. It is a public secret. The Resident also knows about it and, as a friendly adviser, he approved it and is strongly against our emancipation! This is unfortunate because everything that goes from here to Buitenzorg passes through his hands.[132]

Goodbye dearest! Will you send me the satin soon – then I will have something to do that I will enjoy doing. Give Mijnheer our warmest greetings – and also to your son, from the three of us, and for you a firm kiss, we think of you.

Your own
Kartini

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132 Kartini was well aware that affairs concerning regents' families were carefully scrutinized by the colonial bureaucracy and, equally, that regents could exploit this colonial oversight to intervene where they saw Javanese adat being threatened – as in the case of Kartini's 'outrageous' plans.

To Mijnheer Abendanon-Mandri

24 November 1901

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

How very kind of you to send me the two articles about Native crafts.[133] I am most touched by this kind thought and I thank you most heartily. I will read the two articles at my leisure and then return them to you. Father has already told me about your Sindanglas woodcarver whose ability so invoked your admiration. What a nice idea to have a chess set made representing Indies' motifs. I do wish I could see all these wonderful things, how that would warm my Indies' heart. I do so like to see the beautiful things made by our people that I very much admire and of which I am so very proud.

I hope that you will like the jewelry box for your future daughter-in-law, our Jepara artist has done his best with it.

Mevrouw has no doubt acquainted you with what is happening here. Would you tell her that she must not take it too much to heart. It could have been anticipated that it would be a very, very difficult struggle and that there would be a great deal of suffering. Old, handed-down beliefs are not so easily pushed aside to make room for new ideas. Poor parents, that it should be just their children who had to be the first in whose hearts the new ideas were planted!

We thank you most heartily for the kind little teacher you have posted here. At the moment she is here, has been since yesterday, and tomorrow she will leave from here to school. She is now living-in with the Assistant Resident and spends Sunday with us. Two weeks ago Heer van Lawick van Pabst[134] was here and viewed the woodcarving.

I am looking forward to the letter that I will be shortly receiving from Mevrouw.

With our warmest greetings, and also to Mevrouw,

Yours respectfully
Kartini

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133 There is no record of Abendanon himself having published such articles at this time.

134 HJW van Lawick van Pabst was chief inspector for sugar and rice culivation, which directly invovled Javanese farmers, but seemingly was also interested in indigenous enterprises.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

29 November 1901

Our most heartfelt thanks, dearest, for both your letters that radiate such a warm deep love for us; that gives us life and strength. We knew that we had a small place in that fine, warm, noble woman's heart, which is so precious to us, of that we had long been convinced. Everything spoke and speaks of your love and this last letter is a moving illustration of it.

There had to be love, a great, warm, deep, love to have been able to write me this letter when you were so ill. My deepest thanks beloved of my soul. Poor, poor, dear, how are you now? Oh, I hope so fervently that that suffering has now passed and that my dear one has recovered. How did you become so ill, what did you have? It was no doubt a reaction to all that dreadful business and wretchedness you have experienced in recent times.

Oh, to think that my letter reached you in the midst of such misery and that you found the strength to write to me. How great, how deep, how strong is that love which you have for the Javanese sisters which has enabled you to do this. Thank you dearest, thank you. With such love we cannot be poor even in the midst of dire poverty. Such love is a beacon, it uplifts, strengthens and comforts.

We knew the contents of our letter would bring you both bitter grief. It will no doubt please you to know that, while things remain the same, we are now calm. It is now no longer totally dark in our hearts – a great peace and calmness has settled over us. Through the darkness and the mists we see a wonderful figure emanating light that signals to us with a friendly gesture: our Ideal.

No, we now know, we can no longer be separated from it, it has become part of our existence. To be separated from it would be our undoing. It has not just been today, not just since yesterday that we thought about, felt, suffered and lived for our goal! We would have to be given a new heart, new brains and new blood in our veins to make us think and feel differently. Whoever has once looked deep into one's soul, the source of the divine in human beings, has perceived and understood its cry for Light, can never again forget it.[135]

What you wrote to me I have already thought, felt, experienced. Long, long ago, right at the beginning when we began to get to know each other, I told

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135 What Rosa's reassurance consisted of and what Kartini's ideal now was remains somewhat ambiguous in the absence of Rosa's letter. The 'suffering' refers to the news of Kardinah's impending marriage and her father's ill heath and presumably Kartini felt, despite everything, the need to commit even more firmly to her ideal of women's emancipation.

the sisters many times, pleaded with them, begged them to leave go of me, to not be dependent on me. What am I, who am I, proud fool, that I calmly witnessed, accepted without demur, that the sisters followed me? I was entering foreign, unknown ways that were meant to lead to heaven but that could also lead me to hell. And the latter sooner than the former; hell is much closer and easier to reach, and heaven is so far away and so difficult to approach. 'Yu' said the sisters, 'neither you nor anyone else can provide us with beliefs, or fruitfully sow them in our heads and hearts, had we not already had an inclination in this direction. We will go to heaven or hell together.'

My beautiful, faithful souls, it is not they who learnt from me, but it is I who was and still am, their pupil. Oh, they have taught me so much.

How could it have been otherwise than that we would grow together as one in our thoughts and feelings. Everything, within us and around us, contributed to our becoming one. Throughout our entire lives we have been together, subtract from that the greatest stretch of time, the time we lived beside each other in form only, and that leaves at most the last six years – and then look at those. Souls who have been together but once in a moment of great intimacy, can never forget each other again, what then of us who for 6 years have lived in complete harmony together. The experience of these years counts as ten-fold.

We are the same, hear the same, day and night, discuss everything with each other. With everything we find ourselves in agreement, desires and tastes concur. We read the same papers, magazines, books, exchange and compare ideas about what we have read. Our parents are pleased to see our single-mindedness, and greatly encourage it less by word than by deed. And their pleasure in the trinity has sometimes gone so far as to be unfair to others who stood on the outside, privileging the trio over others.

But let me answer one question in your letter (the sisters will answer the other letter): 'whether without Kleintje's approval the day of execution (I cannot give it another name) can be determined'. The unfortunate thing is just that with us, marriage can take place entirely without the involvement of the woman. To arrange a marriage only the permission of the father, uncle or brother of the woman is needed – at the wedding the presence of the girl is totally unnecessary. Only when she has neither father, uncle nor brother is her presence at the wedding required. Our guardians can marry us off to whomever they wish. Only in one circumstance may our parents not force us to marry, that is when the marriage candidate is of a lower social status than us. Parents may not force their daughters to marry beneath them. That is our only weapon against the whim of our guardians.

In order to marry, the man has only to accompany the father, uncle or brother of the girl to the penghulu, or someone else and the marriage is arranged, even if the girl wants to have nothing to do with it. If her parents wish it, then she will be married. An older sister of Mama's refused to marry. She would rather die than marry the person her parents had chosen for her. Heaven was merciful: 3 months before the wedding cholera took her away; had she lived no one would have concerned themselves about her refusal and would have married her off despite her protest. It was incautious of mama to have told us.

There is nothing new under the sun – even in Mama's time there were rebellious girls. We have been constantly lectured that we should blindly obey our parents. And the same was also said to a young woman who obeyed the command, followed the man to whom she had been married and felt unhappy with him: 'Nonsense, merely tinkas, why then did she want to marry? If you are married, you must want to. If you follow a man then you must have wanted to and if you have wanted to then you cannot complain.'

When I received the letter and the 2 articles from Mijnheer we were on the point of leaving to go to a wedding. It is not customary for young girls to go to a wedding and sit with the wedding guests, but Mama generously gave her permission. Were it not that the bride's mother, an old acquaintance of ours, had insisted so strongly that we should honour the large feast for the bride with our presence, then we, R. and I, would have gladly stayed away. And the bridegroom was Mama's brother. Before we left we saw from our house the bridegroom's party going towards the mosque. It poured with rain, the carriage in which the bridegroom travelled was closed, as were the other carriages that followed the unfurled gold striped payungs as they crossed the alun-alun. That represents the ideal of our countrymen – gold-striped and golden payungs and sparkling W. buttons.[136] Oh poor, poor people!

It was a sombre procession, we were moved by it – it reminded us of a funeral procession. Arriving at the house of the bride we found her completely ready, sitting in front of the kwadee, awaiting the bridegroom who was still in the mosque. Father came too – and looked very pale! Poor, poor father, we knew where his thoughts were wandering. The surroundings in which we found ourselves, the performance that unfolded before us, brought to our mind with a cruel starkness that which was so near at hand. We sat on the ground near the door, this old fellow between her two sisters. Incense and the perfume of flowers filled the room in which the bride and we were sitting, the sounds of the gamelan and

[136] The reference is to the buttons on colonial officials' dress uniform, marked with the letter W, referring to Queen Wilhemina. Ceremonial 'payung', large umbrellas of different colours, were symbols of rank.

the quiet murmur of voices came to us from outside. From the bride my eyes travelled to my neighbour, and from her to my Father, who sat outside. The gamelan commenced a song of welcome, the bridegroom had arrived.

Two women grasped the bride by each arm, raised her up and brought her to meet the man who, also led by 2 people, was approaching her. Having come to within several paces from each other, bride and groom threw rolled up sirih leaves at each other, then stepping closer; both sank to their knees and sat opposite each other on the ground. On her knees the bride then shuffled closer to him and professed to the gathering her subordination to the man who God had created for her. Having come directly before him, she made a respectful sembah and then humbly kissed his foot. Another meek sembah and both rose and hand in hand went to the kwadee in front of which they took their place together.

'Yu, Yu,' Kleintje whispered merrily, with bright eyes and a roguish look on her pert face, 'Oh, how I would love to see a bridal couple who approached each other happily and who threw the sirih at each other with a twinkle in their eyes. That of course would have to be someone from the younger generation, a bridal couple who would already know each other, like Yu and the R. of Serang. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Yu? Will it happen one day? I would so much, so very much like to see it.'

'The time will come,' I said matter of factly and smiled, but oh, here inside it was as though my heart was pierced through with daggers.

'Can you imagine it? Can you believe it? Can you?' I whispered to sister R. in a strangled voice. A pained look flashed across her face and with a heavy heart she answered: 'Don't speak about it, Yu, I cannot cope with it, I am already so dispirited.'

And, on my other side, with a beaming face and sparkling eyes, sat our sister! In my heart there sounded a cry of desperation: 'For how long, for how long will those eyes continue to sparkle, that dear face shine with happiness?' From the slender, bronze figure at my side, my glance wandered outside and fastened on the well-built figure surrounded by Native officials and for whom the gathering was sitting in reverence. He had just glanced in our direction and I saw a face, very pale and strained. Again a piercing pain inside me! 'Oh why? Why? Why?' cried my desperate heart in utter confusion.

The following day I reached, carelessly, for a book. I wanted to read to soothe my soul. I opened it and what had I selected? *Het Gebed van de Ontwetende* by Multatuli.[137] A day or so ago I again reached without thinking

137 'The Prayer of the Innocent' (1860).

for a book. Again it was a Multatuli I had picked up and the first thing I read was 'Thugater'. [138] The words still echo in my ears: 'Father, tell her: that to know, to understand and desire is wicked for a girl.' That great, brilliant writer little suspected when he wrote those words that one day they would be deeply, deeply felt by daughters of the people of whom he was so fond, and in whose interests he had offered up so much, yes, everything.

'Yu,' sister R. said to me, 'it is cruel of me but I do so long for the end, whatever it might be.' Oh, pity us all! Like Barthold Meryan we also know what awaits us, if we continue kneeling before the altar of our innermost desires – an altar that can only be constructed on the ruins of everything that till now had been honoured and held dear by us.

Years ago my brother took a vacation for health reasons. When he was to return home Mama said that a woman from Solo was to return with him whom Mama had engaged to teach us Kedaton manners,[139] we country girls were so hopelessly formal. We were most excited about this and looked forward to the arrival of our governess. My brother returned home and a little later a young and beautiful woman arrived. We were overjoyed with this attractive apparition and immediately lost our hearts to her. The next morning I was writing in our room when the door was angrily thrown open and R. stormed in. One could immediately tell that she was terribly worked up. Oh, I can still see her – still hear her exclaim: 'Imagine Yu, she, she is not a governess, they have misled us. She is his wife!'

She had tears in her eyes and her face expressed her inner turmoil. 'And I thought, really believed, that our boys were different to others. It was like a slap in the face when, just before, I heard them speak of her as his wife.' I turned my face away from the grief-stricken child. She was about 15 years of age then. In me also a great illusion had been destroyed. This was our first big disappointment, our first great and deep sorrow!

For the world at large, although they know better, he is regarded as unmarried, but not for us, we cannot pretend. He is quite clearly, legally married to her, and she is his wife. We cannot, like others, when asked whether he is married, reply, 'no' without a blush or hesitation. We pretend not to hear the question, talk over it or, if it is unavoidable we say: 'He has no Raden Ayu.'[140]

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138 Thugater (Greek=daughter) was the milkmaid in Multatuli's *Minnenbrieven*. The parable of Thugater concerned the tradition of denying girls education.

139 That is, the manners of the Javanese royal courts.

140 Here Kartini again highlights the distinction between the formal marriage of a regent when elevated to the position of authority with a woman of noble birth, who becomes

We cannot pretend she does not exist – she is his wife, he is legally married to her, what does it matter whether or not she is or is not of his social standing – she is a person, our sister-in-law. Now, he is not committing a sin, while she is his only one, but will this always be the case? She knew it beforehand and here it is made very clear to her time and time again – that she will not remain the only one, for one day a Raden Ayu will come to whom she will have to be subordinate. And even if she were told 100,000 times that one day it would happen to her, do you think it will not pain her when it does eventually occur? We human beings all know that we must die, that all that lives must die, but does this knowledge lessen the pain, diminish the sorrow of those who are left behind?

Of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet, it is said that when her husband brought home a new wife, her father asked her what she thought of it and she answered proudly: 'Nothing.' Her father gave her a raw egg which she held against her heart. The Prophet took it back, broke it open and the egg was cooked. She leant against a banana tree and immediately the fresh leaves withered and where her body had leant, the tree trunk was burnt. Since then, women's hearts have not changed. This story reveals how many women think about the cruel prerogative of men. One regards it as a matter of honour to be able to endure one or more women at one's side without a protest. There is such terrible, terrible suffering in our women's world. From the outside everything seems to be in order but if one were to lift up a corner of the curtain hiding the inner world, one would see so much that is sad and wretched.

There is a Regent with a European education, who has graduated from the Gymnasium, he is the father of several children but only the children of his Raden Ayu still have a mother; the others as soon as they were several months old were taken away from their mothers who were sent away.

There was a woman of the people who became the no. 2 wife of a Native official. The 1st wife, who was not right in the head, left him after a while leaving him with a number of children. No. 2 became the official wife and was a loving mother to her stepchildren. She was very industrious, worked hard to extend the income of her husband in order to make it possible for her children to have a good education. And it was largely her doing that the sons gained good positions. And now her reward. On an occasion when he went to the city and returned home late he called to her to come outside. A guest had accompanied him for whom she had to take care and prepare a room. She came

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his Raden Ayu, and his marriage to a woman 'of the people', often his first wife, who was then relegated to the background. This is the situation in the case of both Kardinah and Kartini.

outside, the guest was a young woman. And then … and then her husband told her that the guest was his wife and that she, his old wife, must from then on share everything with her.

Upset, stunned, she stared at him, she did not understand him but when the terrible realization came to her, she fainted without a sound. When she regained consciousness she immediately demanded a divorce. At first he wanted to have nothing to do with it but she insisted till finally he gave in and gave her the letter she demanded. That very night she left the house on foot and walked through field and forest to her parent's house in the city. How she got there she did not know. When she regained her senses she was with her family who told her she had been ill for a long time.

Later when she had recovered, she looked at the letter that she had extracted from her husband on that awful night and it appeared she still had not been divorced, that the letter contained a description of her and the information that she had run away from him. He had not the least intention of giving her her freedom. Later she was reconciled with him, the other woman left the house to live elsewhere and she retained her position. That terrible night she swore a great oath, she ate sand. She would never, never contribute to the undermining of the rights of others. She had done it once as a child – when, at the age of 14, her parents had married her to that man. She did not know what she was doing, she merely obeyed her parents – she had been punished for it. She now knew what agony it was, to be thrust aside by another from her husband's side. She remained true to her oath. Not long ago her husband married off a cousin to someone who already had a wife. She resolutely refused to be involved in the wedding arrangements and defied the anger of her husband. The wedding was not held in her house.

We know her very well and have a high regard for her. She has herself to thank for what she is – she has educated herself. She learned nothing at home – she taught herself to read and has worked her way successfully through several books. We were often astonished by her insights that were evidence of deep reflection and a healthy intellect. She is truly an amazing woman. So here is a woman (and there will be others) who has read and seen nothing, but who thinks and feels as we do. But she has suffered terribly. Her suffering has not been unique, many have suffered in the same way before her and with her. But where would I end if I were to tell you about the suffering of Native women. Anyone who is not blind and deaf knows the suffering in our society. Tear the hearts from our bodies, and the brains from our heads if you wish to change us. You should see Kleintje curl up her lips in derision when she hears anyone speak about being married or unmarried. Did I teach her that?

Long before you sent me the words of Zangwill from *Dromers van het Ghetto,*[141] Kleintje had expressed almost the same idea, although of course in different words. We were eating cake or something like that. Little sister came along and wanted some too, there were no clean plates available and Kartinah said: 'Just use Yu's plate … then you will become just as clever as she is.' At which Kleintje exclaimed:

> No, don't do that, it is best that you remain ignorant. Being clever is not a good thing for everyone. It is terrible to be able to contemplate something and not to be allowed to realize it, to be able to feel, to want to do something, to feel, to be able to, to want to and not to be allowed to do it. Better to remain ignorant.

There was a cry of desperation in those words. And that child is considered not to be a good student.

Some time ago sister R. wrote to our brother in Holl. about this matter and said: 'If possible by peaceful means, if necessary by a tremendous revolution.' Who placed those words in her mouth?

I had written to you some time ago that Mama was being very sweet to us. What is the cause of this? It is she we have to thank that the execution had not yet taken place long ago. When Mama spoke to me about this in March, and I raised our objections, Mama said to me that Mama had immediately drawn Father's attention to the fact that that man already had a wife and children. Dear, kind Mother, forgive me, I had so underestimated you. The woman in her had spoken – unfortunately her voice had been allowed to be smothered by fear of public opinion that would declare: 'Ma has opposed the marriage because she begrudged Kardinah that great good fortune of becoming the wife of a Regent.'

Mama further told me that my oldest sister, hearing of Kleintje's good fortune, exclaimed: 'Kasian, poor child.'

But what then did our sister want? What was she waiting for? There is hardly one Regent who is free. Check all the kabupatens and count up all the Regents and sons of Regents who have only one wife. And – do we have the right to judge?

I reminded Mama of our upbringing and recalled to her how once she had considered it cruel that certain Chinese parents, who had given their daughter a European education, had later forced her to marry an ignorant Chinese. I reminded her of a European-educated Native woman who married a school

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[141] Dutch translation (1898) of *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) by Israel Zangwill (1864–1926).

friend who was her mental inferior. She was surrounded by wealth, honour and respect, but was she happy? And I reminded her of much more and it was at that time that Mama said I should speak to Father myself. Ma gave me permission to try to make Father see things differently.

I tried but I just could not get an opportunity to speak to Father. Every day Father had to make official trips and at night there were guests – or we ourselves had to go out. I had to contend with a lot but I could not endure to see Kleintje so utterly unhappy while no one paid any attention to her suffering. That made me furious. Have you ever had a loved one cry in desperation in your arms, her sobs shaking your body? What did you feel then? What went through your soul? What went on in your head and heart?

'Let me fight this out on my own, sisters, they must not touch you.' I watched her in the morning, and in the afternoon going in to have discussions and returning without success. She was not listened to. I watched her face become small and pale, heard little of her voice and no longer heard her laughter at the table, oh, it was so wretched; she lost her appetite. People could see what was happening but paid no heed to it.

That I could not bear. I could not bear to watch her suffer so and it made me furious that she was ignored. After having several times tried in vain to put my view across, I clenched my teeth tightly and thought: they do not want to listen to me they shall not hear me. And they did not hear me and that stirred things up. Oh, people thought I was consumed by jealousy and shame – and that weakened their hearts. On one occasion, overcome by moral pain, leaning motionless against a wall, with unseeing eyes wide open staring into space, a cry of grief came to my ears which brought me back to reality. Father was leaning over me, he was holding me in his arms, holding me tightly, his face turned away from me. It was the cry of grief of a wounded soul which, trembling, cried: 'Oh no! No! Not this way, not this way! Nil, Father will speak about it with others, have patience!'

'Monster, evil spirit!' it was screaming inside me, 'that you are letting him suffer this way. Cruel wretch!'

With his arms around me, father brought me to the back veranda to where the others were and, in passing an open door, I saw Kleintje sitting like a statue by a window. What sensations took hold of me once again!

That day Father went to Pati to the old Regent, our cousin. R. and I smiled sadly. Did Father want to involve that old man in our affairs? Did he also have to be involved in a decision about it? We realized that our affairs would change from being complicated to becoming a woeful confusion if the entire family were dragged into it. Alas.

The first time a family council was held was when Kleintje was so very ill. I can still see it before me. It was the morning for the gamelan, in the pendopo the gamelan was playing softly and one did not want to know, one wished to forget that something terrible was hanging over our heads. Father could not bear to see his child suffer in this manner and betook himself to an isolated corner of the pendopo. There they sat, the two brothers, Uncle[142] and Father. Before them was a table on which stood two foaming glasses of champagne, opposite them the gamelan played and in our room a young life wrestled with death. Cries of physical suffering mingled with cries of moral pain and interposed between them, making fun of all this misery, were the sounds of the gamelan – the bitter irony of the reality of life.

That was the overture of the tragedy that will shortly be performed. That is the way it will be: music, flowers, incense, sparkling light, champagne, while inside murder of young, fresh souls.

Will it be like that? Will it? Oh Father, why did you not heed the voice of your own heart, why have you listened to outside voices? Why drag into our affairs others who have no interest in us and are indifferent to us, when it is your own conscience that must decide and when those who are involved only want and need your opinion.

When Father spoke about us with Uncle we knew that our concerns were in danger. Uncle considered Mojowarno to be beneath us. Uncle would look for something better for us. We knew better – we had to be put down, pushed back into the darkness. As if we did not know that people viewed with displeasure that we were thrusting towards the light?

Oh, and one act, it needed only one act of courage and the gaping abyss that threatened to swallow us up would be covered over. The more it was discussed, the more father lost his sense of direction and now we are imprisoned in a maze of insoluble problems.

Oh why, why could he not have followed his own conscience? Father considers our ideas beautiful, acknowledges our desires for knowledge and justice. It was no pretence when Father last year gave us permission to arrange for our independent existence.

It makes us so rebellious to think why we are being repressed. Why must we go back? Why must we be cut back, have our wings clipped? Because of narrow-minded, mean-spirited gossip. It is because of that that we have to give up our ideals – to make a narrow-minded, mean-spirited community happy. If it were necessary, unavoidably necessary, that we put aside our dreams –

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142 This was the Regent of Demak.

well yes, then we would. But that is not the case, everything pivots on: public opinion! Everything is destroyed because of it. Everything is sacrificed to it.

People might say this or that if we did what we wanted to do. But who are these people? Bah! And it is because of these people that our desires have to be repressed, smothered, and we have to return to the darkness? Even to think of it makes me wild. The interest of intelligent people is important, no doubt, and we know how they enjoy the fact that the cultivated and educated play up to us but the stupid laughter of the ignorant majority is more important, far more important even than the opinion of the informed. Can we accept this?

So much has been said, written about, the progressiveness of our family, the progressive Condronegoro family. Grandfather died long ago, but his name lives on, is mentioned with respect and love by whoever knows or hears of him. Grandfather was the first who gave his sons and also his daughters a European education. Grandfather was a pioneer, was a truly high-minded man.[143] We do not have the right to be ignorant. Father is highly respected in European society as well as in ours and why? Father has not a single Regent as a son-in-law but Father has had his children – sons and daughters – educated to be thinking individuals. This is an achievement which has earned Father much honour and respect. And that honour and respect from those who understand will not be diminished but will be increased, should Father crown his work by allowing us our dearest wish – that Father himself brought into being. But the mocking laughter of those who do not understand is greater. Oh!!

Kartono, our friend, who is so supportive of his sisters, was indignant, angry, furious when he came to find out about it. The only person in our family who dares to be himself is so far away from us. About the question of marriage, he wrote:

> I did not know that it would become so serious, that is why I wrote to you in such moderate terms. But now that the matter is becoming increasingly serious I must declare myself again and with emphasis: the marriage shall not take place. I shall oppose it with all my might. Never shall the violation of the rights of a young girl take place Nil, you three belong together. Later I will join you. A separation under such dishonourable circumstances and conditions must on no account be tolerated. At least

[143] The grandfather, Pangeran Ario Condronegoro (Regent of Demak, 1850–66) engaged a Dutch tutor for his children of both sexes. An uncle, Raden Mas Ario Tjondronegoro, Regent of Kudus, was the author of what is regarded as the first 'modern' Javanese text, *Lampah-lampahipun Raden Mas Ario Purwolelono* (1865–6).

> I will not tolerate it and will voice my opposition. Definitely refuse, do not be weak. I know him and my dear Cuwick will not be handed over to him. You three must not enter a marriage that is not based on mutual friendship and feeling. Once again, refuse, definitely refuse; maintain your honour! Stand by her and tell her that you, Bik Mi and I will support her and that we are all saying: do not give in. At stake here is the securing of the triumph of a new fresh beginning. For that reason, never give in, never, do you understand?

That is what he said, a boy.

Poor friend – how sad he will be also. He asked me if he could write to Father about it, perhaps he could change his mind. And I had to say no. It was after his attack – Father had to be spared from any emotion. Much later, if I only hinted at our affairs, oh, the change that would then come over the face we so loved! A powerful emotion could be fatal to him and what an ocean of misery would then be brought to so many.

Certainly it is very, very difficult to give advice. We knew that – and also that we would have to struggle on our own. And yet I came to you – I could not help it – I had to talk to you – explain everything. *Egotism*, forgive me! That is the result of you spoiling me with your love and sympathy! Oh dear, dear friend, yet we are rich and blessed, despite all the misery. Your love strengthens us and uplifts. The tragedy is unavoidable, only a miracle could change it – and… the time for miracles has passed.

What we beg of you is: do not worry about it – do not grieve over it too much!

Poor, poor sister. Oh God! – stand by her, we cannot lose her, we cannot give her over to so much suffering, and we cannot free her from it. She will be told: 'Give in or lose Father and bring great misery to everyone who is dear to you. Choose!'

But when it has happened, when the execution has taken place, do you think Father can bear to look at R. and I? Bear to see our faces? Even if we say nothing, reveal nothing of what disturbs our hearts, do you think our conscience will allow itself to be silenced? Intentionally or not we will constantly be there to act as a reminder of the violation that was committed, the moral murder. Kleintje's sacrifice will have been for nothing – unless we are also sacrificed. If that tragic event takes place, would we then be permitted to go away to study? It would be opposed more than ever because 'the world' would say: that out of desperation born out of an insane jealousy we were throwing ourselves into study. People will be talking about the insanely jealous sisters.

Our reputation is also in danger – oh, everything is endangered. Our education was a charade – the intention was to show off – we were going to be noticed for our real or false jewels, it did not matter. And we cannot complain, even in the society through whose light we have come to know ourselves – it is appearance that is greatly admired. Poor fools, who love Truth over the omnipotent King of Pretence. We too will play at comedy – our pride that will not allow the world to see the wounds of our souls, demands it. When the Kabupaten is bathed in a sea of light, when feet walk over flowers, when joyful music and happy voices fill the air, when people in festive dress crowd the tinsel-decorated kwadee to wish the bride good luck,[144] we will have to observe it with an untroubled face, indeed looking happy and excited. We hope we will be able to, for her sake. Oh, if only there were a draught that could make one forget.

You are free to do what you wish with that letter of mine, do with it what you think best. Poor parents, poor friends! Do not take it too much to heart – it will not be the first time that souls are violated – right must give way to injustice – truth to lies! R. and I will not give up our ideas, should Kleintje collapse before this superior force. This will be the case – poor, poor child! If Father will not send in the petition – then we will do it ourselves – is that allowed? The Resident is opposed to our emancipation, Father has informed him of it and he has advised against it. He also prefers to see us travel the well-worn road. He was the one who gave me the books.[145] Can he destroy us? – the petition passes through his hands to Buitenzorg – and Buitenzorg will seek his advice.[146]

Annie Glaser has left most of her text books behind in Holl. – which ones they were she no longer remembers exactly, it is already so long ago that she did her exams. She has written to her sister who attended the teacher training school in Surabaya and asked her which books are used there in the course for the assistants' certificate. She will write to her sister again about it soon and when she receives a reply I will write to you. In the meantime she has given me 2 arithmetic books by Laberton.

Our aim has always been to go to Holland to study – will this be possible? Would there be a chance that the Government might approve the request if

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144 This in summary describes a typical wedding. A detailed account of Kardinah's wedding was provided in a letter to Hilda on 21 March 1902, included in a later section of this volume.

145 The reference is to the Resident of Semarang, P Sijthoff.

146 In his memorandum accompanying Kartini's petition Resident Sijthoff strongly opposed Kartini's request to study in the Netherlands but recommended government support for undertaking further education in Batavia. See pp. 32–33 above.

we made it? R.'s aim is to go to a drawing academy to become a painter. Of everything she prefers drawing and she is considered to have a talent for it.

There is a movement aimed at reviving Indies' arts. If R.'s talents and feeling for art were developed in Europe, could she then not become one of the people who could serve this movement well? She is a child of the people and a feeling for the art of her people is in her veins, she is born with it. A proper European training would develop and enhance that feeling and her talents could be of use in the advancement of Native culture. And the arts are no small factor in social welfare. Do you both think this foolish? It has always been her greatest dream. If you think this is too foolish we will accept it and R. will apply herself to studying to become a teacher. But will this plan to study in Holl. be approved? Or would this be to ask too much from the Government? Raden Kamil[147] studed in Holl. did he not, as did 3 others, entirely supported by the Government. I wanted to know these things because if one asked for too much – it is likely one will get nothing! But… but the cheeky own 3/4 of the world it is said.

And then, might not our age (poor old spinsters) not detract from our proposal?

2 December 1901

It has happened – our poor – poor sister has had to give in. She called us and told us that it would take place. What is the good of recounting to you what has just taken place. She is greater, greater than any one of us – greater than all of us! While her body shakes from a broken heart she says: 'Let me go Yu – do not think about me too much … do not think too harshly of Father, do not blame him … do not let him notice anything, do not let Mama notice anything.' I will, I shall keep myself under control for her, but oh! … it broke my heart to see her suffer so and to think what awaits her. She is great, greater than us all. I know what that decision has cost her, and what it will yet cost her. She is so proud by nature and character.

What is to happen I do not know – but it will happen very soon that I do know. 'Do not think too harshly of Father' – oh noble, noble child!

God – God is there no way out? None? None? Poor, poor darling, now she is writing to Kartono to comfort him. Now Father and Mama are happy and beside them a young noble heart bleeds to death – it is so hard!

I cannot bow my head or fold my hands. Oh that look in her eyes when she told us! And it is said she is aping us! People will say she wanted it of her

147 Indirectly Kartini is here challenging both the Resident and Abendanon's plan for her. Raden Kamil, educated in the Netherlands, became a inspector of native education stationed in Semarang.

own accord. Sacrificed – sacrificed to vainglory – sacrificed to the King of Pretence.

I had better not write any more, except to thank you for all the beautiful things you have sent us. How very, very kind of you that you have thought of Moeder – she accepted your gift with tears in her eyes. I am very, very pleased with my beautiful painting. I will have a Jepara frame made for it. Wonderful that you are better again. Thank you dearest, thank you! Excuse the many faults, I cannot reread this – the letters are dancing before my eyes. A tragic affair has been performed.

Goodbye dearest, give Mijnheer my warmest greetings and receive a warm kiss from

Your own
Kartini

Several hours later

She has come to see me, flung her arms around my neck and sobbed broken-hearted. What did she ask me? If I would always love her, always, always. And oh: 'Do not despise me Yu. Yes you must always, always remain very fond of me.'

I, despise her? My jewel? Me, not continue to love her, my dear heart and soul sister? 'If you do not despise me and always love me I will be happy – the rest does not concern me.'

'Please – do not be sad Yu – because then I cannot go through with it. Do not let our parents notice anything, kasian, they are old … You, Bik Mi and Mas To must continue the work. Go away from here and take Bik Mi with you. You must not stay here – leave here soon – when it has happened – go and study. You must begin your studies soon Yu – and then commence your work – bring it to fruition. Leave me, Yu, don't do anything about it – kasian, Father is already so old – but you two must go away, must not stay here longer – commence the work – our … your struggle. They said it would be in March, or April, but I asked them to advance it, February, January. Let it happen soon, very soon – then it will be over. I feel nothing any more. I no longer think – but you must not grieve – that I cannot bear. You two must not be sad, that I cannot bear, could not bear. Yu – always love me. Gone. Gone – let go of me. Do not be so sad Yu, that I cannot bear. Be happy for me, for our parents.'

That was the separation – the separation from all her dreams – the burial of the murdered ideals. Oh, that from this grave new flowers may spring forth! I hope fervently it will be so but I cannot promise it. My heart is breaking while

writing this. I promised her – before she came we promised ourselves: we will continue our struggle – the work shall be completed.

Will you both support us, help us fulfil our promise to her who is for each of us the child of our heart and soul? Now more than ever we long – we are totally resolved to bring to fruition the work that awaits us. For her – for her who gave herself to it so completely but was not able to – who had to succumb to a greater power. I feel a new, powerful life rushing up in me, a new fresh strength streaming through me!

Is there a possibility that the Government would approve if we asked for an education in Holland? Would you both help us, support us? We must embark on a royal route – that is – go to Holland, study in Holland.

'Our people are not very susceptible to high ideals or noble principles.' Kartono says justly. 'We must surprise them with an example that speaks to them and that persuades imitation.' In this way we will best be able to avenge our darling: by making a powerful beginning on the gigantic task to which we feel called: to bring to an end the screaming injustice which has broken the hearts of a thousand times ten thousands of women and which has now broken the heart of our dear one. For her sake, who you also love, we ask you both for support to realize our ideals.

For her we can do nothing more, she herself asked us to do nothing more – for Father's sake. And yet, just one word from her and I would go to Father – to anyone who could take that great burden from her. We cannot bear to see her like this. She carries her cross honourably, she is friendly and sweet to everyone – but those eyes … oh! they burn into my soul! In these few hours she has aged. No, Kleintje – I cannot yet accept it – that beautiful young life – to see it violated – but I shall not make your cross any heavier. If Father should fall because of her – she would not survive it. But can that frail body bear such grief?

Noble, noble child – not a single complaint about her own suffering … and for those who caused it only words of love! She forgives and asks forgiveness for them. There is a noble and fine expression on her face – suffering has purified her – us it has brought down – we thirst for revenge. But that revenge will be noble, dearest, as noble as the one who we wish to avenge. Would you both write to her – to give her moral support? If you think it better not to – then do not. I shall ask Anne to come here later – that will offer her some distraction.

11 o'clock at night.

We have been out, rode through the Chinese quarter – amongst the houses celebrating the wedding. At the Gonggrijps whom we were visiting, she talked and laughed – but a laugh, so sad that in contrast sobbing would seem happy. Holy Spirits support her. Father goes on official tours every day. Poor, poor

dear – the day before yesterday we went for a walk – Father held my hand constantly – we walked a circuit – his arm was constantly around me – Oh!

Forgive me that I have told you everything. Goodbye dearest.

She has written to all her friends telling them of her decision: you, Kartono, the Ovinks, the Quarteros. There is something solemn in what she is doing, it is as if she is taking her leave – forever. It is a farewell.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 December 1901

My own dear kind Angel, our warmest, most deeply felt thanks for everything and everything. Oh, I would love to be able just to fly over to hold your hand, to thank you both for your love, friendship and support. And I would love to tell you so much that I am not able to put down on paper, I lack the physical strength for it at the moment. Kleintje may have written you already that I was ill last week. I requested her not to tell you when she wrote, how serious it was. Now that the worst is over you may as well know that I was extremely ill last week. Fortunately Father was not at home at the time – Father was in Tegal,[148] that poor man would otherwise have taken it very badly. Poor Mama, she had to cope with it alone. I have her to thank for my life. If thereby Mama has done herself or her loved ones, or me a service, the future will tell.

I remained fully conscious all the while, even in the period of the most excruciating pain I remained clear-headed, except that it was black before my eyes. Last week I did not think I would have been well again by now. But I have always been very healthy and I want to remain healthy. One does not get to heaven so easily, it has to be earned. And I have not yet done anything which has earned me a place in heaven.

Now all the pain has gone and I am only still a little weak. Ma has always been so proud of my strong constitution, I saw that she was suffering when she saw my grimaces of pain. Kasian, so Ma is fond of the black sheep of the family. I was spoiled like a princess – my mother thinks it wonderful to care for me as though I was a little child. In those terrible days I was totally their child again.

The last few months have been so terrible, have demanded so much of my physical and moral strength – I have felt unwell for a long time – I have been attended by the doctor for at least a month – and now it has finally broken out.

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148 The Regent of Tegal, a relative, was the father of the prospective groom. This suggests the visit was to discuss wedding arrangements.

I anticipated it and was terribly annoyed by it. A shame that it is just now that I have become ill – we have so much to do for Kleintje. She has asked me for a painting, but I could not possibly do one now, my hand is still too unsteady. And it seems rest is out of the question: they do not want me to tire myself out yet they are constantly coming to me, now to fix a mistake in a kebaya someone was making, then to edge some material. I am so annoyed with myself that I become tired so quickly. I am going to feed myself properly; every morning Father comes to collect me for a walk and each afternoon, if the weather is fine, we go out riding. I need much fresh air and light, I need exercise and good food – then I will return to my old self.

They have just called me away – to … to measure Kleintje for a silver bridal crown. They have had it in the house for months. This is something new – a crown is unknown with us – is it European? – after all we do everything in European style!!

We once dreamed of placing a garland of orange blossoms on the head of our dear heart – this dream will come true … but oh! The crown will suit her very well. Oh Kleintje! Kleintje! Why? Why? She is so pale – poor, poor darling – she is also suffering physically and is under doctor's care.

She told Anneke the great news. Annie had known about it already for a long time, even before she came here,[149] and she had also heard about someone else and mentioned one of the young Regents of East Java. This is not true – God grant that it be never true. Kleintje finds it so difficult to play the happy bride for Anneke. She must not tell her – that would poison the dear girl's soul. She has already experienced such disillusionment in the Indies – learned of strange things whose existence she had not even suspected when in Holland. In her happy home she had only seen and known life from a sunny perspective.

The sisters had alluded to the fact that it could happen – that we could leave here. Annie made a great fuss: she would cry herself to death if she could not have us here. R. comforted her that should this happen, she could have our room when we were no longer here. Annie was indignant: 'What is your room without you? – what is the kabupaten, what is Jepara without you?' She would move heaven and earth to be transferred, to be sent to where we were. 'And what about Mientje?' asked our sister. 'Oh, what of Mientje, I can always see her again, but where will I find such companions as you two?'[150] She idolizes her sister, as she does her. I am telling you this to give you an idea of how Annie would mourn if she knew the real course of events. No, the pure

149 The implication of this comment is not made clear. Possibly it suggests that the impending marriage had been known to the Abendanons.

150 Mientje is a reference to Anneke's sister, also a treacher.

conscience must not be poisoned by such suffering. She is so fond of our dear one, has thought up a name for her and cannot endure others calling her by that name. She suspects nothing, leave her in her ignorance!

'Oh, now I understand,' she said, 'why you are so often melancholy, you long for him so much! Why do you marry him in such a hurry, are you so impatient?'

'We have already waited such a long time, Anne.'

'And you were planning to study first?'

'At first there were difficulties, but now that I can, I like this much more.'

And we are both joining in the act. Oh! it is so hard, so hard!

Yesterday sister asked me: 'Yu, have I become an idiot?' And then she burst out, 'Oh God! Oh God! Why has this happened to me! If Papa had loved me as much as he loved you, would all this then have happened?'

Yesterday and today she has been very melancholy. It is hard, hard to see her so broken-spirited.

'I thought I would have the strength to do everything but now I can no longer do anything. I have no energy left.' This was her cry of desperation this morning. The day has been set – it will take place on the 24th of January. God give her strength! It will take place here in the pendopo, in the evening, and directly thereafter the meeting will take place. Poor, poor, darling! She did not even know his name. We looked up his name in the Government Almanac. She has even less of an idea of what he looks like. 'Yu, Yu,' she said, 'how is it, what does he look like. I am afraid I will get the fright of my life when I see him!' Extraordinary circumstances! And we are supposed to be cultured and educated! To me it is a mockery when I hear such things!

They have said nothing to her about his wife and children. However, she is so grateful that she is not uninformed, that she knows what she will find there and what awaits her. I hope that aunt will come to be very fond of her – I think there is a good possibility. Aunt is very fond of Father, of Mama and, as a young girl was very friendly with my Moeder – later as a married woman she met Moeder again and she was still very nice to her. And Aunt idolizes her son – even though he is not her own child.

Sister wants to be a little ray of sunshine for Aunt, that poor soul has also suffered much. She had the same upbringing as her brothers, her husband was also brought up by grandfather together with the uncles and Father. On the basis of everything I have heard she seems to have been a very intelligent girl – spoke perfect Dutch and also French – but after her marriage never spoke a word of Dutch again.[151] Everyone in Tegal knew she spoke Dutch and spoke

[151] Kardinah was to marry her cousin, whose mother was Kartini's father's sister, one of the first generation and amongst the first Javanese women to have received a Western education.

to her in Dutch, but she replied in Malay. Why? Because in terms of mental development she was his superior and he forebade her to speak in Dutch. Her daughter – (she herself has only 2 children, a boy and a girl) – received no education at all, at least no European education. 'Not necessary,' said the father, 'my daughter can become R A Regent even without speaking Dutch.'

2 daughters are married to Regents. But what did one of their daughters say to Mama: 'Parents are cruel to their children in not letting them study.' She said this during a ball at which your girlfriends were feted as rarities.

Aunt's son was also to share his sister's fate but aunt begged and pleaded so much that uncle finally gave in and the boy is now boarding in Semarang. Our future brother-in-law is apparently able to speak Dutch, how well we have yet to see. We impressed upon sister to give no indication if he does not speak or write it perfectly. Most men are vain – they will be able to forgive everything but not an attack on their vanity – we have seen and found this out.

Sister has resolved to be everything for the children and to be very nice to their mother. That will not be easy because she will be suspicious of sister – but she intends to persevere. She must be and will be convinced that sister's intentions regarding her are good. Poor, poor woman – sister sympathizes with her: 'I shall enter his house with the curse of a mother over my head,' she said. 'The debt has been paid,' she said, 'and I take the burden of a new debt on me.'

Do you understand – do you feel that we, R. and I can do nothing other than continue with our plans, cost what it may? We want to give ourselves over to it completely, we ask nothing for ourselves, we want only that something is done about that sad and cruel tradition, that a beginning is made to end it. It will cost us dearly, we know that – but we must offer ourselves completely.

The most difficult problem for us lies with our parents. You know how very, very much we are attached to our parents. But what has to be, has to be. We are ungrateful children – but we can do no other and we will have neither rest, nor peace, nor life if we do not act in accord with our deepest convictions. We would continually rebel – life would become unbearable and, in the end, the result would be – we would do ourselves in or go to the institution in Buitenzorg.

We do not want to sail in a wreck any longer. Something has to be done about this wretched business. We would already be quite happy if only the attention of right-thinking people was directed to this question. More than once I have spoken to the wives of Native officials and women of the masses about the idea of emancipated, independent, salary-earning girls. And regularly the question becomes one of: 'There has to be someone who sets an example!' We are convinced that if one person has the courage to begin, many

will follow. Really, it will not be a hopeless task. The only issue is that someone must go first, and the example must be a good and decent one. The one awaits the other – no one dares to be first – the parents wait on each other: 'Who will have the moral courage to educate their daughter to be independent and emancipated, to stand on her own?'

We know a daughter of a Regent – of our age – who is also completely wrapped up in the idea of independence. She would love to study further. She speaks excellent Dutch and has read much. She is the daughter of the Regent of Kutoarjo.[152] There are two grown-up girls, the sweetest children, we like them very much. I know from a teacher, an acquaintance of ours, that the oldest one would love to study. She herself told me she would very much like to see Europe. The second girl is also a nice, sweet thing but we do not think there is much inside her beautiful head. She will soon marry a very young Regent, she herself is very young – not yet 16. They were here several years ago – when they returned home they immediately learned to paint and now the youngest paints quite well. The father says it is such a great comfort for the husband when a wife has had some education. He greatly appreciates the refined and educated woman. We have spoken to another married daughter of his who, while she speaks no Dutch, is nevertheless very well informed and is very interested in the freedom and independence of European women. She would like to see it exist in the Native world as well.

When the girls came here with their parents, Mama asked their mother if the eldest was her eldest. And what did we hear: 'No, she is not my child, she is the daughter of a maid, she (she indicated the youngest girl) is my eldest daughter.' Poor Roebilin. Mama told me this with tears in her eyes, it pained her terribly. Mama has never told anyone that we are not her children, and it grieves her terribly when anyone speaks to her about her stepchildren. The way Mama looks after us is really beyond all praise. Just recently, what did Ma not do when I was ill – she burnt her hand to provide me with warmth when I could not move – she slept before my bed on the ground in order not to leave me unattended for a moment. That is love, you don't do something like that if there is not love.[153] The human heart is so richly strung, we are often confronted with realities that dumbfound us and fill us with wonder and admiration!

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152 No further information could be found on this person. Kutoarjo is south central Java.

153 This is a significant insight into Kartini's changing relationship with her 'stepmother'. This contrasts with her reiteration here of earlier criticisms of the typical results of a polygamous marriage. Kartini had now also to consider in a more positive light the reality of he future her sister would now experience. It may suggest how she later comes to see her own role in a polygamous marriage.

Another daughter of a Regent has been here, a Sundanese girl – she spoke not a word of Javanese and conversed with us in Dutch. The first question she asked me was: 'How many mothers do you have?' I looked at her with a pained expression (she was brought up in a European home) and she continued (do not be shocked): 'I have 53 mothers, you know – and there are 83 of us (I repeat, eighty-three). Most of my brothers and sisters I do not know – I am the youngest and never knew my father – he died before I was born.' Isn't this terrible, terrible? The girl is now married and lives in Buitenzorg. Her husband is the brother of the well-known Patih of Sukabumi. Acquaintances of ours have met her and, like us, have thought she was lovely. She is now 19 years old.

In many areas of the Preanger girls of aristocratic families have a free choice, many of them know their intended husbands. The young people know each other and become engaged in European fashion. Blessed land – and yet, and yet. There is a girl – the only granddaughter of a Regent (her parents are dead) – who received a wonderful education. Judging by what she has been taught she must be a model of erudition – she plays piano beautifully, etc., etc. – gets her way in everything – and is extremely rich. She is a friend of the Sijthoff family who have had much to do with her and from whom we have heard much about her. She became engaged in the European manner and married someone – who has wives and a number of children, some of whom are adult. I made the acquaintance of a daughter-in-law of hers, a sweet, Dutch-speaking woman, mother of a two-year-old-child – she was then 17 – a year or two younger than her mother-in-law. She chose her husband herself she told me and is very happy.

My heart ached when I heard that that girl was going to marry and with whom. But now she has become the wife of a Regent. She is apparently a millionaire – but what is money without a golden payung? Who knows how much she had to suffer before she attained that? Colonel Staal was present at her wedding as representative of the G.G. v.d. Wijck.

We saw and heard much in the Preanger that brought the blood to our head and forced cries of pain from our hearts. It must not continue this way.

And now I come to your letter. Oh dearest! It pains us greatly to hear that Mijnheer is still suffering and that you have so much sorrow. And me, wretched egotist, continue to add to your grief. We hate ourselves for it, so there! If only we could make you forget us! It is such a sorrow for us – that all those who love us and who are dear to us, grieve over us. We are truly wretched creatures!

I read your letter with tears in my eyes, I was so full of emotion. There are many bitter, cruel, hard things in life, but, as well, there is much that is holy,

uplifting and good. When I read your letters then I am moved and a feeling of tenderness comes over me. Oh, could I but show you the extent of my love for my Angel. Thinking of you both is such a comfort for me, such a support in difficult times and in joyful times it doubles my happiness. The names of you both are burnt on my lips – there is not a day when your name is not mentioned here. I would be desperately unhappy and would despise myself the day I did not dare look you in the eyes. God grant that day will never come!

We will think carefully about the questions in your letter and will give you our replies only after due consideration. At the moment we cannot give them our undivided attention. We wanted only to know if there was a chance that our request would be accepted. If there was no chance at all then we would not even attempt it. If we were to undertake it the entire Javanese world would be watching us. We have to go to work carefully: one small mistake could seriously damage our project.

But – those who dare not, gain not – so onwards! In August I spoke to Father about our plans, asked what would happen if a petition was to be sent to the G.G. and said that if the petition was refused we would direct ourselves to the Queen. Father said that the Resident would not allow it, that he was very much against it. I said it would not do to let things stand as they were, a decision had to be made – we were certainly not getting any younger – and the longer the delay the more difficult it became for us. And Father knows it is no whim on our part but that it is seriously meant and that we have set everything – our thoughts and feelings – on this. And I heard neither a rejection nor a refusal – only the idea of going to Holland Father would not accept – we would have to stay in the Indies. And preferably to study at home.

Father said he would ask Mijnheer to place a suitable teacher here from whom I could receive instruction. Father had told me this already long ago, but the idea did not appeal to me – because assuming that Mijnheer approved Father's request, at home I would not be able to give my undivided attention to my studies. I know how it would be, at every moment I would be called from my work – when we had visitors, if we had guests to stay, I would have to accompany my parents to festivities and other places. In short, I would not be able to apply myself completely to my studies due to the conventional duties from which I would not be able to extract myself if I stayed at home. And when I study I have to give myself completely to it, every day is one more day for me. I am not so very young any more (in retrospect this does have an advantage – we are now more open-minded and understand things much better than before). Before you had written to me about your plan (for self-study) we had already begun to look through Kartono's schoolbooks and

brushed up on that which we had still retained. Father saw it and did not look pleased, but said nothing. Poor Kleintje, amongst my papers there are pages of her language exercises.

Our parents honestly admitted that they were still unable to accept the possibility of letting us leave home – single – on our own, as adults. They do not have the courage, do not feel they are able to let us go, as independent girls – Raden Ajeng have first to be transformed into Raden Ayu – only then can they let us go. They certainly do not think it is a bad idea – they do not reject what we want to do, in fact think it is wonderful – but … but they do not dare.

It is enough to make one wild to think that our lives might be ruined because of people's gossip. And what types of people they are! Oh, there is so much anger and jealousy. We are hated enough – by our own relations. They do not dare approach us three directly – the cowards – because they know we would pay no attention to their idle chatter and would calmly go our own way. Kleintje especially understands the art of maintaining a cool expression so that people begin to feel cold under her icy stare. Sometimes her face can look as though it is carved from marble.

It is a pity though that our parents and others allow themselves to be influenced by this whining. In the end it is just ridiculous, ludicrous, what they complain about. When they could find nothing else to attack us for they criticized our hair. Poor people! We have come so far as to have pity for the poor things. Kasian, they cannot think otherwise, they have never learnt another way of looking at things!

Still, I am wandering off the topic. The idea of publishing everything I think about and feel relating to the terrible conditions in our Muslim female world has been with me for a long time. I had considered presenting it as a book in the form of an exchange of letters between two daughters of Regents, one Sundanese and one Javanese. I have already written several letters by way of introduction and have made notes.[154] I will not give up the idea although it might be several years before it can be published. I will especially not give it up now that I know that it is also an idea shared by Mijnheer.[155] The great difficulty is that Father will not allow me to publish such a book. That I have a

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154 This project was apparently not completed but her key concerns are included in several letters.

155 Using the letter format was a well established practice in presenting information in a popular style. Abendanon's colleague, Snouck Hurgronje had published an account of Islamic life in Java in the form of series of letters on the practice of Islam in Java, under the title, 'Brieven van een Wedono-pensioen' in the *De Locomotief* 1891–92. Nellie van Kol had become famous for a similar series of letters a decade earlier collected later as *Brieven van Minette* (1884) purporting to be letters of advice to a Dutch reader about colonial life.

command of the Dutch language is very nice, Father says, but I cannot make use of it to express my opinions. We girls cannot have opinions – we have just to accept everything and say 'yes' and 'amen' to everything others consider is good.

Some years ago already, a Dutch woman, a notable writer, editor of a women's magazine with whom I correspond and for whom I have a high regard, asked me for permission to publish a letter in which I had briefly referred to these matters. It was possible that publication might generate some discussion and this would be a valuable contribution to our project. She would render it completely anonymous; name, address and so on would be omitted, all personal matters would be removed and she would only publish those sections in which I discussed certain traditions and customs of my country. The letter was returned to Java to be shown to Father. And permission was not granted – later … I knew what this meant – when I had been rendered harmless – the Raden Ajeng changed into a Raden Ayu. That lady raised the question several more times but the answer remained no. Recently she referred to it again.

Mevrouw Ter Horst, editor and initiator of the Indies' women's magazine *De Echo* who personally knows a lot about the life of Native women and sympathizes greatly with the aristocratic girls of the Vorstenlanden, who are more or less handed out, given as presents to whoever might want one, offered to put the journal at my disposal.[156] She suggested I begin a conversation between 2 daughters of Regents. Anonymity, should it be necessary, was absolutely guaranteed. Also insights into our life would be useful. I gave the letter to Father to read, received permission, but before I could do anything it was revoked. For the time being I could not voice my opinion – again it was a case of: later…

Heer Boes of Probolingo wrote to Father asking my involvement in his paper, *De Nederlandsche Taal* – a journal for Natives. Mijnheer got his way. I was allowed – I wrote to Heer Boes – received a reply giving me several topics to deal with: 'Native education for girls', 'Something about Native culture' and 'A useful Native institution'. But then we had to go to Batavia and so much happened I could not get down to writing and after that I was becoming so desperate with one day being allowed to and the next day not that I tore up my writing. Really silly of me – I can be so bad-tempered sometimes. I despaired. I was only allowed to write nonsense, serious things I was not allowed to mention.[157]

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156 *De Echo* had published two stories by Kartini in 1900 under a pseudonym.

157 The 'nonsense' were the two stories then published in *De Echo*. See below Part Three.

And then I started thinking, if I wrote about those things then no doubt I would get the whole of Native society against me and then what would become of me as a teacher – who would entrust me with their children? I would simply be declared crazy. And yet, the idea of serving our objectives by means of writing is so attractive to me. Imagine, a school with no children, a teacher with no pupils! – but it has not come to that yet. We have first to work out how we are going to be able to study.

First of all we will try to convince Father to support our petition to the G.G. In the meantime I will do my best to write a letter to H[er] M[ajesty] along the lines you suggest. We hope that H.M. will still remember us when we appeal to her. H.M. has in her possession 2 paintings by the sisters, presented to her by us on the occasion of her coronation. H.M. has also once read letters from us. Unfortunately I can no longer recall what these letters were about. They were directed to the president of the Indies' section of the women's work exhibition. At the Exhibition H.M. was shown a letter of ours 'as evidence of how good education in the Indies had become in recent years' – my nose curls with pride! – Their Majesties asked the president to read out a few sentences. Later, after a visit by the private secretary of the Queen Mother to Mevr. Lucardie, who had been sent by H.M. to see what was happening in regard to the paintings, that particular letter was taken to the Palace and a short while later our token of homage was received by Queen Wilhelmina.

We have heard that the Queen Mother in particular has a great deal of interest in the Indies. We will not set our hopes too high that our petition will be accepted. And, oh God, if it is not, then what? Then … there remains only one other way: to become a midwife. We would then have to give up our ideas of progress and enlightenment. We would only be able to make ourselves useful to a small number of people but this we think would be much, much better, and we would choose this occupation above that of bookkeeper or pharmacy assistant, for instance. Our lives in such occupations would be so empty, so meaningless. We would be living for us alone and we want to live for the community at large, to give ourselves to this entirely. I have obtained full information on the State Training School for Midwives in Amsterdam which provides totally free training for that vocation.[158] If we have to go in that direction then we will seek the assistance of Prof. Hector Treub. It would certainly make a difference in the minds of our countrymen if we were to become a midwife, where we underwent our training. They would not consider it

158 See Kartini to Stella, 11 October 1901. Details concerning this may have been provided by Stella.

so lowly if we were trained in Europe. The course takes 2 years. How we would get to Europe in that case? We do not know, but a solution has to be found.

But we will not take that option until we have tried everything else to achieve that other objective.

Tomorrow we are going to Semarang and tomorrow evening to the reception held by the Resident. Kleintje is dreading it. She will be congratulated publicly at a large gathering. Poor, poor thing! She wants to come along to Semarang and I must go with her. She wants to go to the photographer to have a photograph taken of us three girls together for one last time. All three of us have become old in the last weeks. R. does not look well. Oh, we all look terrible. Kartinah cried the entire night after Kleintje told her. She could not and did not want to believe it. She only calmed down when Kleintje assured her that it was of her own free will and that she had chosen him herself.

Little Soematri was terribly shocked when she found out and exclaimed: 'And what about Yu, Yu? Will she go too? After all they cannot be separated! Oh, she also will soon leave. You see, when one clock chimes, then the others will too.' What a clever thing, where does she get it from, that little one!

The lining of the box has now been completed. I began it immediately, as soon as I felt well enough. I am now only waiting for the silver edgings.

I have paid for the box	*f*25
For the silver edging I paid	
*f*11 in labour and in silver	
6 dollars at *f*1,35 each=*f*8,10	*f*19,10
Have already received	*f*25
Spent on the staghead	*f*11
Money remaining	*f*14

It has ended up being quite expensive but I hope that you will nevertheless be happy with it. If you are not pleased with it then send it back and we will have it done again.

They wanted to file down Kleintje's teeth,[159] but we became so furious about this. Kleintje says she had no intention of biting anyone. I reminded Ma that last year without our asking Mama of her own accord had said that she and Father would not touch our teeth, that we could keep them the way they were. I called all the sisters who had heard it together as witnesses. I remembered

[159] The tradition of filing teeth of women before marriage was still practised.

the place, the date, the hour, when Mama had said this, I had noted it down. Mama was silent – nothing more has been said about this.

We have heard much praise about that woman – we regret we do not know her personally. She is a daughter of the Regent of Bojonegoro.[160] We will make an effort to make contact with the young crowd. Oh, if only we could get into contact with our educated progressive young men like Abdul Rivai, etc. – to get their support for our cause, how helpful that would be! Oh, when will the day arrive when boys and girls – men and women – will regard each other as equals, as comrades? Relations as they are now in our Native society – bah! How we women are humiliated time and time again!

Now I will end, I am so tired – I must reserve my energies, so much will still be demanded of me. When we return from Semarang I will write to you again. Goodbye now dearest – the sisters send you both their warmest greetings! Sleep well, goodnight! She who will dream of you is,

Your own
Kartini.

We are enclosing with this 3 letters from Kartono, would you read them?

When we return from Semarang I will send you the list of books needed for the assistants' certificate course.

Goodbye, we must make ourselves ready for travelling.

Is it true that if we send a petition to the Government, it will be discussed in Parliament? Will it then not take a long time? And is it true that the advice of the Regents will be asked? We are so terribly ignorant – please – will you enlighten us.

[160] No further information was available on this person. Bojonegoro in East Java had been the centre of the Samin movement against colonial rule in the 1890s.

LETTERS 1902

Introduction

Whereas in 1901 Kartini's correspondence with Rosa is defined by a deepening relationship developed through sharing her emotional responses to the marriage of her sister, Kardinah, in 1902 this correspondence is overshadowed by her contact with Nellie and Henri van Kol. Although the number of letters directed to Rosa again dominate – 28 letters in 1902, compared to 24 in 1901 and 30 in 1903 – many of these now refer either to her new contact with Nellie or to plans for her further education in the Netherlands that were being arranged by her husband. Kartini's letter to Nellie of 27 April appears to have been suggested by Henri van Kol during his personal meeting with Kartini in Jepara (adding to doubt on the addressee or date of the August 1901 letter). Nellie's article in *Oost en West*, which introduced Kartini to the wider world – a further consequence of this meeting – is appended to this letter. The membership of Oost en West, if still limited three years after its establishment, constituted a major colonial-interest lobby comprising an important cross-section of influential figures advocating colonial reforms.

The letters to Rosa at the beginning of the year touch on a number of themes that had already emerged but were now becoming more defined. One concerns the fate of her newly married sister. In retrospect this immediately bears comparison with Kartini's account of her own marriage two years later. One notable similarity is the way Kartini is able to suggest at least one positive outcome: that her sister could now begin to realize in a practical if more limited (but perhaps more realistic) way, the ideas the trio had been developing together. Kartini presents her own situation in similar terms in 1904.

The second major theme in this year's correspondence is Kartini's role as intermediary for the growing number of 'clients' interested in commissioning craftwork from the Jepara woodworkers. This must have involved considerable effort as well as responsibility and was only made possible by Kartini's position as Raden Ayu, backed by the authority of her father, within Javanese society. Nevertheless the success of this developing venture depended upon Kartini's own ability to define the requirements of her European customers and maintain control of the finances involved, while at the same time working sympathetically as intermediary with these craftsmen. Indirectly, this role can

be seen to have reconnected her with 'ordinary Javanese' who are otherwise rarely present in her correspondence.

A third important theme introduced here is the discussion of religion and a deeper sense of her Javaneseness. The letters from the middle of this year, following the meeting with Henri van Kol, are probably the most significant in revealing Kartini's struggle to articulate her ideals and values. As suggested in the general introduction, it is Nellie van Kol's intervention in Kartini's life that appears to mark an important turning point towards a re-evaluation of her own Javanese heritage. Her declaration in a letter to Nellie of 21 July is central to this:

> We have been searching for so long and so far and we did not realize that that it was so near, continually by our side: It is inside us.
>
> Allah or God, for us it is no empty invocation any more. That word – oh how often used thoughtlessly! – from now on has a holy, sacred sound. Thank you, oh thank you that you have moved aside that curtain that was before our eyes, for allowing us to find that which we have so long been searching for!
>
> If I could only tell you how quiet, how peaceful it now feels within us; how still and entirely content we are: no anxiety, no fear any longer. We feel safe, at peace! There is Someone who guards over us. There is Someone who is constantly with us and Someone who comforts us, who is our support, our safe haven for the rest of our lives. That is what we feel.

While no doubt encouraged by Nellie's references to her own re-evaluation of her beliefs, this apparent 'religious turn' in Kartini's thinking was not a turning away from Islam, of which her letters to Adriani had been so critical; rather it enabled her to reappraise her own religious upbringing. The emphasis here is on a modern, personal religion and can thus be read in contrast to the criticisms she makes of a ritualistic and formalistic Islam in a letter to Adriani (24 September) and her shocked response on hearing the view of the colonial expert on Islam, Snouck Hurgronje, concerning the situation of Islamic women (27 March). It is significant that this sensitive issue was excluded from the extract of the letter published in *Door Duisternis tot Licht*.

Her reference to an 'inner peace' also did not mean a rejection of her plans to study in the Netherlands: the visit to Jepara by Nellie's husband Henri had only strengthened this possibility. Indeed, the 'inner peace' may equally have resulted from that meeting in at last seeing the possibility of her goal being realized! Exactly a month earlier Kartini had composed a draft memorandum (letter to van Kol, 21 June) setting out in her own words an application for

government support to study in the Netherlands. This draft document, requested by van Kol to enable him to make representations on her behalf to the Dutch government, represents the first of three formal memoranda on education that Kartini was to prepare. While it was later to form the basis of a subsequent memorandum for Abendanon, Kartini kept this development from her colonial friends. In formulating this brief memorandum Kartini emphasized the necessity of studying in the Netherlands as a prerequisite to fulfilling her aims for the advancement of women's education and, more generally, to be able to pass on to her people the best of Dutch culture in order to enrich their customs; as a means to raise them to a higher level of morality; as a means to bring about better, more felicitous social conditions.

While the statement still accords moral superiority to Western culture, compared to an earlier reference to the benefits of 'Dutch civilization' in a letter to van Kol (August 1900), there is now an implicit understanding that the social and cultural reform of Java will be on Javanese terms. In this formulation, it was essential that Kartini went to the Netherlands to access Dutch 'civilization' rather than have this imposed by colonialism. Her memo also balances her ambition of studying in the Netherlands with the now more clearly defined goal of becoming a teacher.

Nevertheless, Kartini was now faced with a dilemma. A close reading of the subsequent correspondence suggests that Kartini struggled to find a way to satisfy both the Abendanons – who had been encouraging Kartini to train in the colony as a teacher – and van Kol who, more radically, wanted to use Kartini to test the government's resolve to implement an ethical policy. Crucially the version of her letter of 10 June in *Door Duisternis tot Licht* omits the pages in which Kartini finally sets out the details of her discussions with van Kol, and belatedly reveals how far her plans for Europe had progressed without their knowledge. This she had previously detailed to Stella (17 May 1902) and in the unexpurgated version of her letter to Rosa of 10 June, Kartini confesses 'that I have not written to you about it earlier' and justifies this on the grounds that

> Perhaps I was wrong to do so, but I very much wanted to safeguard you from disappointments. You have already shared so much of our hopes and time and again you have had to share our disappointments.

The letter is timed to precede van Kol's expected arrival in Batavia where 'he will go to Mijnheer. We told him that are you both fully informed about our plans and that we have the support of both of you in our struggle'.

This was untrue in a literal sense, but Kartini adds hopefully,

> whatever happens we can continue to depend on the support of Mijnheer, can't we? If a petition has to be sent or a letter has to be written to the Queen, then can we send it to you both first?

The full details of what had in fact been arranged by her brother Kartono are only finally revealed in a bitter and confidential letter of 12 October. This is a lengthy and significant letter in many ways. It reveals more clearly than any other the opposition welling up in Javanese society to Kartini's ambitions as well as Kartini's bitter and critical assessment of the colonial regime. This and the long verbatim account of the visit to a traditional soothsayer would appear to be remarkable revelations to make to a European. Equally arresting – certainly for the Abendanons – was the information of one further plan for Kartini to study in Europe, in a convent in Paris, being arranged by Kartono. This plan in a sense 'ups the anti' in this uneven struggle against the Javanese and colonial establishment. It envisaged a possibility of completely sidestepping the reach of Dutch and Indies colonial authorities.

As noted in the general introduction, the following year all her European friends were relieved that van Kol's plans for Kartini had evaporated: Europe, they unanimously decided, would be too dangerous for a young Javanese woman. Kartini was therefore not far wrong when she ended her bitter comment on colonial laws with a stinging rebuke of European hypocrisy:

> Still, how can one expect more just laws for us if in the enlightened, civilized West, women are put on a par with children and idiots? (Kartini, 5 March 1902)

By the end of the year, suspicions re-emerge about attempts that appeared to be in train behind the scenes to prevent Kartini from taking up the Dutch government scholarship. Ominous rumblings are recounted in Kartini's letter of 12 October in which she presents a verbatim account of her mother's visit to a clairvoyant, and describes the pressure being exerted on her immediate family to prevent Kartini from realizing her plans for Europe. In an extraordinarily long letter (12 December 1902) Kartini alludes to her suspicion that her uncle was lobbying Abendanon. At the same time (in the same letter) Kartini writes at length on her possible Arab ancestry and fascination with Chinese culture and the cosmopolitan nature of the Javanese north coast region. This appears to suggest that Kartini was increasingly having to balance her desire 'to be free' with her sense of responsibility to her family and, more importantly, to Java. It was this difficult process of scrutinizing her own motives and moral responsibilities, a to-ing and fro-ing between the pull of Europe and that of

Java, that had been emerging in her writing over the previous two years but was now increasingly coming to the fore.

Aside from further letters to Stella (5), Hilda (4), Adriani (1) and Anton (1), a new correspondent enters Kartini's circle. This was Abendanon's second eldest son, Eduard Cornelis (1878–1962), an engineering graduate from Delft Hooge School. He was almost the same age as Kartini and, if his stepmother was Kartini's imagined European mother, he could be her imagined European brother – which is how she refers to him. Besides, she felt close to him because he had known her brother who had also briefly studied at Delft. It was then particularly concerning when, towards the end of the year, Edie suffered a severe accident which subsequently obliged a return to the Netherlands and consequently ended the chance that he would come to Jepara. The tone of this correspondence is reminiscent of the early letters to Stella but now, three years on, we see a much more confident and mature Kartini, speaking far less emotionally about her past life. Although it seems unlikely EC Abendanon agreed with Kartini's hopes to study in the Netherlands or approved of her association with the anti-capitalist van Kol (who had so severely criticized Edie's employer during his study tour) or his evangelical wife, and although the two never met, Kartini maintains a lively correspondence on what was apparently a topic of mutual interest: colonial policy and practice. It is from a letter to Edie that his father drew the famous title he was to use, in modified form, for the published collection of Kartini's letters.

The beginning of a new academic year in September saw the end of her close association with the young teacher, Anneke Glaser. Although born in the colony, Kartini speaks of her in maternalistic terms, suggesting she nevertheless regarded her as a *totok*, a new and naïve arrival to the colony. Kartini makes clear that she shielded Annie from knowing the unpleasant details of Javanese life. In her turn, Annie later refused to provide Abendanon with copies of the letters she had received from Kartini after she left Jepara for inclusion in the 1911 volume. Why Annie did so remains unclear.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

3 January 1902

Only now can I pick up my pen, my dearest, to send you greetings and from all of us our very best wishes for a prosperous 1902. In the meantime I have sent the stag head and the box for your future daughter-in-law by train – without postage. It is rather difficult with payment when we send goods by rail, we

have either to send someone or write the stationmaster a letter, and we have been so busy these last days.

How are you all? Everyone well and in good spirits I trust? With us things are still not as we would wish. Now little Soematrie has been ill in bed for the last few days with a rather high fever. At the moment she is a little better.

On 26 Dec. in the evening we returned home from Semarang. There I had been very ill again, fortunately for only one night. I was still so weak when we left, I could still not get up from sitting on the ground and at Demak, at the home of uncle and aunt, I was obliged to. Taking my leave from aunt, I knelt.[1] When I tried to get up again I fell down and badly sprained my knee. I arrived at Semarang a cripple, there my bad leg was massaged and after half an hour I was able to accompany the others to the reception to which Kleintje went with some reluctance. However it was not as bad as expected – the Resident was sensitive enough not to congratulate her. The Res. thought sister R[oekmini] was to be the bride and looked very surprised when we pointed out to His Exc. his mistake. 'Oh! I had always thought it was you!' When his sister introduced us to the company and mentioned that our sister was engaged, one lady asked, 'To a European?' She was a European recently arrived in the Indies and had heard a lot about us from our brother in Holland with whom she was well acquainted.

Mijnheer Sijthoff was very nice to us, he is always nice but this time particularly so. (Feeling sympathy for us poor things, R. and I!) Oh, could we only win him over, Father and Mother have such respect for him! Some time ago His Excellency had sent me a long and hearty letter, to which I responded with a long letter in which, amongst other things I hinted that I well understood the purpose of his gift of books (about which I have written to you). In a letter to Father, His Exc. promised to reply as soon as His Exc. again had some time. I was pleased with this promise, I so much wanted his response to a number of points. I wanted to know if His Exc. was against our ideas in actual fact or was declaring himself against them simply for our parent's sake. What an idea, to correspond with a Resident – that a person like that who is constantly overwhelmed with such important work should listen to the chatter of a young Javanese girl and reply to it but it was His Exc. himself who had initiated the correspondence.

At the reception, the Res. spoke to me about that letter. I was, however, disappointed. I heard many compliments but not a word about the content. But

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[1] The wife of Kartini's uncle was a princess from the royal court of Surakarta. There is some irony in the episode given Kartini's criticism of feudal hierarchy, and of her uncle's attitude to women's emancipation.

then it was not the occasion to speak about it. I know it is the devil's business for a Res. to conduct private correspondence and we are on the lookout for an opportunity to speak to His Exc. alone. On the 24th His Exc. will visit us, or so His Exc. promised our sister. It is doubtful whether we, R. and I, will be present on that occasion since normally we cannot be present if people from another country or social class visit. But the Res. will see us and speak with us, we know His Exc. well enough. His Exc. will ask to see us. It was His Exc. who, 6 years ago, brought us out into the public, it was at his behest that we appeared, before that we had never appeared in company, did not even enter the pendopo, and all those who wanted to see or speak to us, had to come to us in the house or on the rear veranda.

It is rather nice to think back to that time, how we went step by step along the path to Freedom. It was Heer S. who helped us make the first step. Now we are at the point of entering a new phase. The 6 years which are behind us have been our happiest years – much sorrow but also much jubilation!

I must write the Res. one of these days, I shall try in that letter to introduce one or two matters apropos our discussion when we met last which will serve as an introduction to a discussion in which we hope we will be able to engage His Exc. later. If we could gain His Exc.'s support then we would have in His Exc. a great support in obtaining permission from our parents.

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At first we girls were to go home on the 24th with Father, Mama to follow later, but the Res. detained us – that evening there was to be a concert and a Comedy at the theatre. And, oh wonder, we were allowed to stay and accept the invitation of the Resident to accompany him to the performance.

At the Res. house we met a dear, sympathetic woman, the initiator and president of the Wilhelmina Association in Semarang. I had once written to her at Father's behest, but did not know her personally. She and her husband knew our grandparents very well and also our boys. She was one of the first teachers from Europe and is said to be very well educated.

Returning home from the Res. I had my knee massaged again, but it was done so roughly that my bones cracked and I suffered excruciating pain. The whole night I lay prostrate, lost all control over myself and lay like a little child in Mama's arms. I was very annoyed that all the next day I had to lie stretched out on the chaise longue, and the sisters had to fetch and carry for me. But the next day I was well again and could accompany the sisters. That evening only R. and I went to the comedy, our poor sister was exhausted and had a severe

headache. There we were then, the two of us, for the first time without Father, without Moeder – and without her – totally alone in that sea of humanity! A taste of what is to come, that is how it will be from now on, that is how it will be in the future: R. and I alone in the big adult world. We found it so strange, so strange without her.[2] We regretted it so much because it was especially she who was so crazy about music, there was such beautiful singing and such wonderful acting. But it was better this way, it would only have made her miserable. She had, after all, finished with the past and the music would have dragged her back to the land of dreams. She is keeping herself under control, my brave young girl but oh!, how terrible she looks, her face is so thin! Everyone smiles at her and she says: 'After all I will soon become an important woman.'

The brothers are very sweet and nice to us. The brother here likes everything we say, as though we were saying the most amusing things.[3] Especially in the beginning he was very nervous when he saw us, and he would constantly approach us, had to see us. Poor boy, he had also once dreamt, enthused, had illusions and dreams. At first he was intended for the Civil Service, wanted to study further after completing the H.B.S. I had heard mention of him becoming a doctor. Why it did not eventuate I do not know – he did not undertake any exams since he was not going to Europe, he was not bright enough. I was still very young when he left school. I only remember that he was going to take a long trip when he had completed his last year at the H.B.S. He stayed away for a long time and continually postponed his return. Poor, poor boy, he left the school full of dreams and ideals and out in the world a spiritually deadening clerical job awaited him. He was appointed clerk to a Regent. I could well imagine that he was in no hurry to return home. Already while he was at school that position had been offered him by the Resident if a vacancy should arise. (When Kartono was in the third or fourth year, he was interviewed by the Resident and asked whether he would like to join the Civil Service, and what he would want to do then. He politely declined.)

He was such a nice boy, the nicest of the three oldest, everyone liked him.[4] He is very musical and had received a good musical education. According to those who know, he played piano very well, even composed pieces as I heard later from others. And now, what has become of that nice boy? At school he was a fast learner and was good at language. What has become of this? Even

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2 Kartini is referring to the absence of their sister Kardinah that evening, a foretaste of the future following the impending marriage.

3 The reference here appears to be to Kartini's oldest brother, Slamet Sosroningrat (b. 1873). He did not 'succeed'. It was his younger brother Sosro Boesono who was appointed Regent after the death of his father.

4 The three boys being Slamet, Boesono and Kartono.

Dutch he does not want to speak in some circumstances: he simply refuses to speak Dutch to officials. It did surprise us that he was prepared to speak Dutch with Mijnheer. Our friend Quartero became furious about it, that brother persisted in refusing to speak Dutch with him.

As long as that boy does not spoil his chances. Murdered idealism! We fear lest one day he may also become shy of appearing in society. When we have people here then we literally have to catch him to get him here. And his piano? For years he has not touched a key. Very, very regrettable. As a boy the world stood open to him. He could have rescued himself from it, with all his advantages he could have worked to realize his dreams. He has in any event 100 X more advantages than us. The boys received everything and those who wanted it so much could gather up the crumbs others threw down to them. Nature had made a mistake when she made our boys, boys and we girls, girls.

Well that may be too harsh. If the boys are egotistical then one cannot blame them, it is the fault of their upbringing, they were brought up that way. They received everything, were allowed to do everything and what they left, well that was good enough for the girls. I knew it was a big thing for my brother to speak to me about it then. For us it is no longer a secret that he rather likes the fact that his sisters are as they are. We know from many indications that he does have sympathy for our ideas. But to have sympathy and to show sympathy are two different things. The latter usually demands much courage. Also in our oldest brothers, we can see some appreciation but also a silent one.

While we were in Semarang, my oldest sister came to visit[5] – she lives in Kendal. She had not been able to wait to see us three. 'Sis, sis,' was all she could say when she saw me. The arms which were wrapped around me trembled, and her eyes were flooded with tears. Eye to eye, heart to heart, we stood silently together - we understood each other. Finally we have found each other, but, oh!, under what circumstances! I was glad and sorrowful simultaneously. Glad that we had finally discovered each other, and deeply saddened that the moment at which we met was such a terribly sad one for our dear sister. Sister had wept uncontrollably when she had received Mama's letter in which Mama had informed her that our younger sister had finally agreed and Ma had also told her other things including the manner in which she had said 'yes', that 'yes' had been accompanied by heart-breaking sobs and wetted with tears.

Kleintje had always been Sis's favourite – for whom is our dearest not a darling? Our dearest with her beautiful, soft soul. After that letter from Ma,

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5 Her older sister Soelastri (b. 1877), married in 1891.

my sister was no longer able to laugh, only now, after she had seen us and spoken to us has she been reassured.

We have a great deal of sympathy for our sister. One can so easily see that she would love to follow along with us and that she is aware of her powerlessness. Finally then, after many years, we find she has sympathy and a respect for us. It gives us a moral satisfaction and, again, more courage. At first she was definitely against everything novel, was definitely conservative and now … ?[6] It is nice to see her admiration for the young ones. Do not be surprised then that we are so vain and conceited. That no, because of her admiration for us, she recognizes that we are not wicked, that what we are doing is not bad – this does us good but, on the other hand, it does hurt us.

She has a good husband. I have only got to know him recently – we three had only seen him on a few occasions, exchanged a few words and that was all. My brother-in-law complained about it to his wife. He thought that we were proud because we kept ourselves at a distance. Did we look down on him because we were of higher birth than he? (This assumption we really did laugh at, it is true.) I could not really tell my sister that we were not interested, that we preferred to maintain a merely formal relationship between us. My brother-in-law threatened that he would refer to us as Raden Ajeng and to speak to us in High Javanese if we continued to maintain our distance. The last time we met him we had a long talk and I consider that our Sister has drawn a prize out of the marriage lottery. He also went to H.B.S. for several years and then entered the Civil Service. He was also a crown prince.[7] Poor, poor boy! I wrote to my brother that if he later had sons he should have them become bakers or some such rather than allow them to enter the bureaucratic corps. Bah! what corruption exists there! My brother-in-law no longer has a father, all his brothers and sisters went to a Eur. school. A brother of his is still at the H.B.S. – he is in the 4th. class and should be proceeding to the 5th class this year. He is an intelligent boy. A cousin of his is a Regent who had advised my brother-in-law to take the boy from school, he would then ensure his future success. The Regent regularly returned to this idea but my brother-in-law wanted to hear none of it.

'What, take him away from his studies? Oh certainly, and let him become a clerk for an assistant wedono at a salary of *f*15 to *f*20? Not a chance, he must complete the H.B.S. and then go into business or the railways.'

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6 Compare Kartini's earlier comments on the attitude of her older siblings in letters to Stella.

7 That is, destined to become a regent like his father.

Well done brother-in-law! So, he does not worship the gold-striped payung and the Wilhelmina buttons! Nice of his mother don't you think, to allow him to continue his studies when she had still another 4 children at home. He is in Semarang boarding with Europeans. And why did that cousin want to take him from school? Oh, because there are only a very few young Javanese who have a graduation certificate from the H.B.S. and that boy would add to that small number. Envy and Hatred show their grim faces everywhere where one reaches towards the heights of knowledge and civilization![8]

How wonderful it is to have a lot of money, one can make others so happy with it. I wished I had hundreds at my disposal then I would send that boy to Europe to study further. A sister of his who attended the Convent at Semarang is wasting away. Poor, poor girl! She was used to a totally different life, now as a widow's daughter she sees and speaks to no one and is pining away. Had she learnt something by which she could have earned a living would the same thing have happened to her? For such individuals an example must be available to show that work ennobles, that a Native girl does not have to be dependent on her family if she does not want to be.

Is there any greater humiliation than being dependent? If she had trained for a vocation then she would now be free and independent! And what destiny awaits her now if she lives – of course, she will have to marry. Not long ago a wayang orang troop came here and one of the female dancers was – the granddaughter of a Regent! – What was the cause of that degradation?

In former times it was not the custom to send children to school, now it is an everyday event. But, if one has something like 25 children, could one provide them all with a good education? Questions have been asked about the decline of the prestige of the Native nobility. But the question could then be asked whether one had the right to bring life into the world if one could not let it live? Oh, what a simpleton I am. Thinking about all these things, a cry rises from my heart, a prayer: 'Give the Javanese education!' And this education must not only develop the intelligence, but also the conscience.

And each time when I see and hear things which make me shiver with horror, or make my heart bleed, or fill me with sympathy, that prayer rises in me like a cry: 'Give the Javanese education!' One dream of ours is to be able to communicate with all educated progressive men in the Indies. As a single person alone I am powerless, but if the young generation united and cooperated,

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[8] Kartini clearly identifies herself here as a member of an emerging 'kaum muda', the new generation of Western educated Javanese, with which she evidently shared common interests, including criticism of the corrupt 'old regime' of the entrenched Javanese ruling classes maintained in their position by the colonial government.

we could with our combined efforts bring to life something fine. We burn with emotion when we read cleverly written articles by our countrymen. How shall we be able to get into contact with them? Now it is almost a total impossibility. We would be immediately suspected. Friendship between man and woman, between young people together, is considered not possible. Only when our brother has returned could we attempt it.[9]

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When we were last with the Resident (after the reception we called on him once more at his request) and we were talking about this and that, His Exc. said suddenly: 'It is all papa's own fault! Papa could have become Regent of Semarang. It was offered to him, why did papa not want it?'

'Oh, Jepara is not so bad.' to which the R. replied: 'No, that is not the point, it is not good for young girls.'

No, it is not good, we thought to ourselves, here, young girls learn to think. In Semarang, as well-socialized young girls, we would have no time to think, except about toiletries, about flirting and other such important things!

At the moment the Raden Ayu of Kudus is extremely ill – she is aunt's only daughter and sister's future sister-in-law. She has been ill for months and it is for the third time that she has had her parents and family come to her. Poor aunt, tomorrow Mama will visit her. Aunt was so upset when, sometime ago, Mama again spoke to her about a postponement. She cried and said: 'Why did Mama tell sister then?' To which Mama replied: 'That child is not a hen which you can just pick up!'

Uncle and aunt are looking forward very much to the arrival of their daughter-in-law – a comfort for our sister. Aunt also told Mama that the other one was pleased that her lord and master was planning to marry someone from our family.[10] If she had to serve, she would rather serve under the descendants of Grandfather, to whom her family owed much … and to whom she herself was distantly related. She is also of noble birth. Her mother is still alive and is also of noble birth. Our sister-in-law is also of noble birth.

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9 Six years later her sisters joined Budi Utomo (Beautiful Endeavour), the organization initiated by male students attending the medical training school, STOVIA, which aimed to 'bring to life something fine'.

10 'The other one' is a reference to the *selir*, Kardinah's future husband's first wife whom she would replace. It is Kartini's bitter reminder of the circumstances that her younger sister is about to experience.

Shortly after 2nd December, Mama sent for me – poor Moeder, how pale she looked, she asked for my blessing for sister. 'Now Papa is happy,' she said with tears in her eyes. There is now no more rancour in my heart, there is only great sympathy for our parents. Father has had so much grief, too much for one shoulder to bear. We have met so many Regents of whom we have said, from the bottom of our hearts: 'Thank God that he is not my father!'

I thought to myself, if I did something terrible, that really deserved everyone's contempt, and everyone turned from me, utterly reviled me, would Father, Moeder do the same? No! They would not, I would remain their child, would retain a place in their hearts, even if I had done the most terrible thing. And a great feeling of tenderness came over me. While we sit here in our room working on Kleintje's clothes (she will not have a stranger touch them – we have to do everything ourselves) the door is frequently opened and Father enters … to caress the refractory head in which so many rebellious thoughts are circulating.

In our cupboard there are 3 shining rings which we have just received from our parents. We are regarded as children to be comforted with a bag of lollies. It is laughable and enough to make one cry at the same time. It is so very, very tragic how little our parents know us. Kleintje asked us to wear the rings as a souvenir of our 'years of indiscretion'. It is the last object that we have and wear which is the same, and which was made in those days. People seem to like to poke about in their old wounds. R. refers to all those things as 'chains of slavery'. Today our sister feels listless and is very pale. She is not well … what will happen? How will it turn out?

In 4 weeks time she will no longer be amongst us. 'You will miss me very much, I know,' she said, 'But remember you will be many together, and I will be all, all alone.' Once we were a threesome, always the three of us and now? … We will never be able to forget it. Mevr. Ovink asked us to come and stay after 24 January but we will not be able to. She would be sad if she heard that we were going to stay with our friends and we ourselves, we could not go so soon after her departure, there where she would so love to go. It had been a dream of ours for the three of us to visit our friend. No, we will not go, it would only reopen the wounds of our hearts.

There is a possibility that the O[vink]. family will come to live in her area later. Mr O. had been controleur in the Tegal area for a long time; when he gains promotion in a few years he could perhaps get there, we certainly hope so for our sister's sake. We also have good acquaintances in that area, a young married couple, that will be nice for our sister.

We often surprise ourselves how, in these days we still can be happy and light-headed, full of good humour and laughter even, although here inside it is so miserable. 'What I do, I do well!' we say in the words of that great Netherlander. And also comedy we want to perform well. As long as it does not become a habit, second nature! In Semarang, people thought I was very cheerful; they had expected to find me broken-spirited because I had been so ill, but they were wrong! Something I have noticed with some concern: we now mock everything, nothing is sacred to us, we make fun of everything.

That must not be, suffering must strengthen us, not degrade us. No, no, that must not be, will you help us to ensure this does not happen? Pessimistic, cynical – oh no, not that, that must not be, must it dearest. We will be on our guard against it. In a sacred moment I promised my Holy One that I would be good, would try always to be good for her; that promise is sacred.

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In Semarang we saw something absolutely beautiful: a Chinese garden belonging to the head of the Chinese community.[11] Initially we had no real desire to go but we saw that our brother had so set his heart on this little expedition. That dear boy was so childishly excited that we were with him, had thought of everything to make us happy and enjoyed wearing himself out for his ungrateful sisters. So we went along with him. It was a wonderful trip there. The gardens and the wonderful house of its millionaire owner is situated on a hill. It was pleasantly cool there. The beautiful house was empty, it is a country residence and the owner is away on a trip to Hong Kong in his own yacht. The garden is open to the public and the house can also be viewed upon request. We could hardly believe our eyes when we had entered that magical garden. It contains many rock structures artistically grouped. A genius must have designed his garden. The inspiration is pure poetry and the hand of an artist has brought it into life! I will not attempt to describe it because I could not do that beauty justice, it would be a sacrilege. We have never seen anything so beautiful and had never believed something so beautiful could exist. It was a fairy tale brought to life, only dwarves and elves needed to appear from the crevices and caves in the rocks for it to be completely a fairy tale. The rocks are realistically reproduced from karang cemented together. In the cracks, ferns and other plants which are normally found amongst rocks, are growing and on each projecting ledge a miniature fruit tree (bearing fruit) or some flowering plant is growing. In the middle

[11] The reference is to the millionaire entrepreneur, banker and property owner, Oei Ham.

of the garden there is a small temple (with a fine echo) which stands in the middle of a sculpted pond, beautifully proportioned, through which running water streams in which fish are swimming. Beside the temple is a small hill, also made of rocks, planted with ferns, flowering shrubs and miniature, fruit bearing trees. Inside it there is a grotto through which, via a staircase, one ascends to the top where one finds a miniature Chinese house and temple. How should I begin and where should I end were I to mention everything we saw there? From that garden one ascends a hill, this time a real one, where there is another marvellous garden but we did not get to that one, with my injured foot I could not climb so far. On the path up to it there are other buildings with roofs made of leaves and flowers, and the lawns through which the path winds are strewn with Chinese statues. Ponds, rockeries, grottos, flowering shrubs, all kinds of plants, miniature fruit trees – we imagined in the midst of all this, cream-coloured Chinese princesses in spectacular clothes – beautiful, fragile dolls like sparkling, colourful butterflies wandering through a paradise. On another side, the garden is also bordered by a hill closely planted with bamboo. Altogether it was pure poetry. It was full moon and we saw the moon rise while we were there. It was just heavenly. Only necessity drew us away from this small paradise. We are still sakit ati that our sister could not share this godly experience. The poor child was so exhausted - she had to reserve her energies, so much will yet be demanded of her.

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That evening we went to the comedy. When the violins were playing so beautifully we thought again of what we had enjoyed in the afternoon. To hear that violin playing in that cupola, with the quiet splash of the water, the rustle of leaves and, watching before us, through the waving bamboo fronds, the moon rising, that would be heavenly! We met the genial artist who had created all that beauty. He is just an ordinary Chinese – almost unsightly. The garden has not yet been completed, but has already cost *f*76,000. The Chinese has made everything, including even the statues. It is a pity that at the entrance they have placed European-made statues which look so odd there and disturb the harmony. Within one of the hills they have built a bathroom, very neat and it was almost as cool there as in the cool room of Dr Nijland in Batavia.[12] Of the statues we particularly like the dragon – it was also created by the Chinese.

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12 This person could not be further identified.

And the owner of all this wonderful creation is apparently extremely unhappy! Poor rich man! It is the Chinese who has offered the Government such extremely expensive gifts – wagons full of rice for the needy. He is the father of highly educated daughters. One of them is apparently very clever and has the intention of going to Europe to study to become a lawyer – brave one! A pity they have no brother, we would certainly pay court to him.

The 2 articles concerning the arts in the Indies which Mijnheer sent me to read I will send you tomorrow.[13] Would you please heartily thank Mijnheer for them from me? I read the articles with great care and interest. The sisters were not able to read them, they were so preoccupied with other things and now they cannot, with all the work required in preparing the trousseau

Just a moment ago my sister-in-law (the wife of my oldest brother) informed me that she had paid the postage for the box sent to you. I had not given a thought to the fact that I had a brother and sister here in Semarang, when I sent the box off from here. From now on it will be easy for us if we have something to send. The postage costs for your box amounted to *f*5:70.

I will send you the booklist on another occasion – I still have to consult Annie about it. She has been to Surabaya and I have not yet seen her.

We received beautiful books from Jena: Reuter, Couperus, Vosmaer.[14] Are we in seventh heaven in consequence? Of course, but it will be still some while before we will be able to enjoy them.[15]

But now, goodbye my dear, kind Angel! I fervently hope that the new year will, in the first place, bring health to your household and, beyond that, many flowers and much sunshine. Give Mijnheer our hearty greetings from us all and also to Edie – if he should ever come here he must not address us as R.A.,[16] otherwise he will find himself speaking to deaf-and-dumb people.

Goodbye, goodbye dearest, you are warmly embraced on behalf of the cloverleaf by your own

Kartini

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13 The articles could not be identified but it is possible they were by the contemporary Dutch 'experts', GP Rouffaer or JE Jasper. They were not by Jacques Abendanon.

14 See listing of Kartini's library below for details.

15 This would seem to be a gift arranged by Professor Anton.

16 See Kartini's earlier request to Stella: 'Just call me Kartini' (25 May 1899).

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

10 January 1902

Dearest Mevrouw,

Your two letters and the postal order for *f*42:50 have safely arrived and I thank you very much for them. I will gladly retain the *f*5:20 here for the new orders. These however can unfortunately only be prepared later as there are already others before you with orders, including His Exc. But I also had to respond to Jhr de Villeneuve[17] from whom I also received a request, so that the work for the Governor General cannot be commenced till mid-February since the work taken on by the woodcarver from others months ago will not have been completed till then. Just after the request of His Exc. and before your request, good friends of ours asked me to arrange a large woodcarving for them. I promised them my assistance but they will have to exercise their patience.

And you also, dearest, I have to ask to be patient. There has been a torrent of requests recently – it is a great pity that our clever craftsman does not have some working capital. The consequence of this is, amongst other things, that it is not possible to have any woodcarvings ready in stock. Everyone who comes here wants to buy this and that but must constantly leave disappointed. I therefore appreciate the fact that you send money in advance when you order anything. Of this I give the woodcarver a portion of what he requires in advance to buy the wood and pay his assistants. But if it becomes so busy these advances will add up significantly, which I cannot afford.

Ah, for these reasons I would like so much to have a few hundred gilders on hand to allow these people to get on with their work, to buy their creations and make it available here or elsewhere for those who wish to purchase it. Such people are always about: there is such a demand for Jepara woodcarving and they cannot provide it because of a lack of working capital: wood costs money, assistants cost money, and while the work is in progress the people do need to live.[18] I think it is wonderful that you are pleased with the box. I worked on it with love and, to be totally truthful, also with a little sadness thinking of the fortunate bride for whom this beautiful object was intended and of the bride who was nearby, while I was sitting working

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17 No further details could be located regarding Jonkheer de Villeneuve.

18 This letter provides evidence of the important role Kartini served as an intermediary in the growing fashionable interest in Javanese craft amongst Europeans both in the colony and in Europe. Abendanon and other colonial reformers saw 'craft' as a potential new source of income for the depressed Javanese indigenous economy.

on the lining.[19] We think the idea you both suggested is wonderful and wish you great success with the exhibition.[20] Our only regret is that, in the circumstances, we can do nothing for it – we would so very much like to. Will you later tell us all about it?

Thank you for your best wishes. I will not have to ask whether you have been and will be thinking about us during these days. We know it, we feel it. But, what I wanted to ask you is, would you be so kind as to send us in the next few days a few words every now and then, even if it is but one and by postcard. It will be such a comfort. Silly creatures, I was longing for you so much and was so happy yesterday when I received your letter.

I have been in a very sombre mood these last days. Our cousin – the Raden Ayu of Kudus – is dead, she died without having seen her father and mother again and they could easily have come. They had had enough time. Poor unfortunate aunt, how terribly she must have suffered when she heard that her child, her only daughter was dying and she was not allowed to be with her, and now she will be broken-hearted. When she left her daughter a month ago, she was already deathly ill. She had to go. Poor unfortunate thing – and in 12 days time, hardly 3 weeks after the death of her child, she must attend the wedding. It is cruel – it would be monstrous – for that poor woman if uncle allows the wedding to take place on the appointed day. Our cousin (not someone we care about) died and was buried without any member of her family being present. Everyone is most indignant about it. You appreciate that none of this makes our sister any happier, but merely increases her melancholy.[21]

Poor sister – it makes her shudder – she has been given a noble task in the future – to heal the wounds that have torn open aunt's heart. Pray she may succeed, since that is her hope. She would find it terrible if it did proceed on the 24th – till now our parents have heard nothing from Tegal but she dreads any postponement that should make the torture continue even longer. It is terrible! We are doing our best to cheer her up, she is looking so poorly. Fortunately her physical condition has improved. Because of her indisposition, sister has been relieved from many of the torments that a Javanese girl must endure in preparation for marriage.

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19 The reference is to a wedding gift Kartini was preparing for Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri's daughter-in-law.

20 Abendanon was involved in an exhibition of native arts and crafts in June organized by Oost en West and was planning a larger permanent exhibition in Surabaya to display Javanese craftwork.

21 The uncle was Kardinah's prospective father-in-law.

Tomorrow is Lebaran, the last that we will celebrate together. How will the next Lebaran be for us? Will we still be here, or will Destiny have rent us apart like dead leaves in the wind which had once been joined to the same branch? Recently Baron Haersolte van den Doorn, from The Hague, a friend of our brother's has been staying here. He came to bring us his greetings and letters. How wonderful it is to have met someone who has so recently seen our brother and who knows him so well and is so fond of him. We heard very many nice things about our brother, including amongst other things that he was well and was studying hard. He is now studying 5 languages. From Heer van Haersolte we learned that Kartono knows all the Javanese students in the Netherlands.[22] Raden Mas Sojoyo[23] (very clever, after the first exam he went directly to the third, wasted five months this last year but will still be successful at the examination) son of a Regent, who is in Delft studying to be an engineer, visits him every Sunday. Marvellous, through our brother we will later be able to be in contact with the educated, cultivated and progressive young men, the sons of the land! Nice of his friend, don't you think, to come to visit us and to bring us greetings from our beloved so far away.

Heer H. is chief editor of the daily paper of South Holland and is here on a private trip. He returns to the Netherlands in April – ah, if only we could go with him! To go to that country to learn, preferably today rather than tomorrow, but any time.

One of our good acquaintances, whose governess is going to Europe shortly, asked me if I did not know of a suitable replacement. They are the parents of Agnes, our friend – an administrator family in our neighbourhood. Should you come to know of someone amongst the ladies of your acquaintance – or if there should be a suitable governess who would not mind working in this place of exile of Jepara, would you then be so very kind as to let me know? I would be very grateful to you. Do you not find me very forward that I dare ask you something like this? That is what happens when one spoils creatures such as I in the manner you do.

Goodbye now my dear, dear kind Angel, give Mijnheer, your sister and son heartiest greetings from us all. I warmly squeeze your hand.

Your own
Kartini

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22 The reference is to AFRE Haersolte van den Doorn. In the Netherlands Kartono was active in promoting support for colonial reform and developing an Indonesian student movement.

23 There is no mention of Raden Mas Sojoyo in Poeze's overview of Indonesians studying in the Netherlands (Poeze 1986).

To Stella Zeehandelaar

15 February 1902

Our brother is everything to us, he is our friend, our dearest true comrade. They are not the worst types of men, those who are true comrades to their sisters. He shares everything with us and we with him.[24]

If something unpleasant is done to me by people then it makes my blood boil, I feel indignant but thereafter something like joy spreads through me; I am happy that they have done this to me and that it is not I who has done it to them because then I would have been the base person and then, if I was saddened, it would be because they would have shamefully, unjustly, accused me of baseness.

Forgive me that I am only writing to you now; it was impossible to write directly after the departure of our dear one, our heart and soul sister, even though you were never out of our thoughts. Sis departed from here to her new home on 31 January. God grant that our child may be as happy as a young, pure, innocent human being may possibly be. You know how we three are bound to each other, that she was our darling, also because she was not strong and constantly needed our help and support.

We had already suffered so much before the wedding because of the prospect of the forthcoming separation that, when the big blow occurred, we were insensitive to it. We were frighteningly calm, we did not think, we felt nothing. She went and we watched her go without a tear. We were frightened of ourselves, we were so cold, so totally without feeling, nothing touched or moved us. That was unnatural; to be cold, that is against our nature; we were afraid that something was brewing, something was approaching, that such insensitivity was a foreboding of something unpleasant – illness or something. We felt so empty in ourselves, in our heads.

Annie Glaser, our comrade, visited us often at sister's request. One evening when she was with us she played a favourite piece of sister's and mine on the piano. And then gradually the ice which had formed around our hearts was thawed by the notes of her music. And with the warmth, the pain returned to our hearts. Thank God feeling has returned. 'Thank God' we say, regardless of the pain because those who are sensitive to pain are also receptive to happiness. Those who have not suffered can also not appreciate fully.

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[24] Earlier references to Kartono indicate that he shared his schoolbooks with Kartini. No letters from or to Kartono appear to have survived. However his speech to the 25th Neederlandsch Taal- en Letterkunde Congres (Dutch Language and Literature Congress) in Ghent in August 1899 indicates their common concerns and aims. Kartini evidently hoped they could work together on his return.

She has gone far away from us and we still cannot yet imagine that she is no longer here, our Kleintje, our baby. We still see her everywhere. She is amongst us and with us all the time except that we do not speak to each other now, merely communicate in our thoughts. It is still so strange for us that we now need to reach for paper and pen in order to say something to each other!

Kleintje, our Kleintje, have you really left us? Ah, dearest sister, be happy in your new life and spread happiness around you as you did here, thereby chaining hearts to yours.

Stella, be patient with me, I would so like to make you happy with a joyful letter but I will not be able to do so for some time I fear. But do not be discouraged, my dear, we have absolutely no intention of giving up our plans; we are in fact just working at strengthening our position. It is wonderful how we are constantly gaining more support.

There is a young person, very intelligent and of high moral standing, who does not know us personally yet is so supportive of our cause, and takes such an interest in it that he could be our brother.[25] We correspond and later he will come here in person to make the acquaintance of his sisters. How different he is from all the other young people that we know. The most holy thing on earth, I read once, is a noble male heart. We subscribe to these words: truly, the heart of a noble man is the most priceless thing on earth, it is so rare. Fortunate are they who happen to meet such a pearl in their lifetime. And how fortunate are we that we know one such priceless, rare example. You see, everything that is good supports us, constantly gives us new, fresh courage and energy to labour and do battle.

* * * *

Sister Roekmini loves you very much and idealizes you. She is such a dear child, so good and so loyal. You would certainly get on well if you knew her. But you already know her through me, don't you? When I was so very ill I asked her to write to you but she did not want to because it would upset you. I hope passionately that her dearest dreams may be realized.[26]

Do you know what started me to reflect, and also somewhat discouraged me? When she and, later, I were so very ill I thought to myself: regard this person, who glows with a fever for a noble cause, who with high ideals and passion wants to serve the good in the best way she knows; she believes she is strong enough to move mountains and, see there, there she lies totally defenceless and

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25 This is a reference to EC (Edie) Abendanon.

26 No letters by Roekmini to Stella appear to have survived.

powerless! If someone should pick her up and throw her in the well she would let it happen without a murmur, completely defenceless, totally powerless.

Only now do we understand what De Genestet said in 'Terugblik':[27]

> What we desire, will or strive for
> A higher power determines.
> Free person, your path, your life
> Is not set by you
> The flight of eagles have fixed
> Destinations to which they speed.
> The Supreme Being bends the will of the strong
> Like the wind bends the reeds.
> Prepare the ground plan – your castles in the air
> On the planning map,
> Note the route which you will travel,
> Wide and beautiful is the country!
> Choose your destiny and seek your paths
> According to your own lights! …
> But expect a compassionate God
> Who will direct your footsteps.

This same poet has provided us with such comfort in difficult and dark days.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

18 February 1902

Hello my own dear kind Angel! So finally you are hearing something from Jepara again! That you were longing for news, we knew, and also that you had forgiven us for making you wait so long. You do know, of course, don't you dearest, that the long silence is not due to a lack of feeling. Come, let us now thank you with a warm kiss for your letter that did us such good and let us quickly make you happy with the news that we are extremely well, all in good health and in good spirits.

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27 PA de Genestet, poet (1829–1861). 'Terugblik' (Looking Back) was one of his most popular poems.

No doubt, dearest, you thought that we would be downhearted, but we are really not so, which is something we ourselves are surprised about. And it is better this way – may we now put everything behind us.[28] What else can we do? Tell Edie that we have taken his words to heart and we are very grateful for them.[29] Dear, kind brother, we are looking forward to a personal meeting very much, we hope very much that the opportunity will come for us to speak with our dear brother in person. His hearty, sympathetic letter was a great comfort to us, and did us so much good. At present we are enjoying *Gosta Berling*.[30] Tell him that also.

We are very pleased to hear from you but it is so sad that the two of you are not in good spirits. Between the lines we could read a desperate cry for 'change'. Dear, dear friends, is there nothing we can do to provide a distraction. Ah, could we only hop over – we can also be so really crazy and playful, so <u>really young</u> – or could we but lift your spirits here.

On Sunday after receiving your letter, and again this Sunday we went with Anneke[31] to the beach. We thought about you and talked about you! Ah, if you could have been with us, to look at the rough action of the waves, at the unbelievably beautiful play of colours that the glittering sun conjured up in the sky. Such a strong wind was blowing that in no time at all, our coiffure was destroyed and we had difficulty holding our clothes together. The trees were alive, there was life in the infinite stretch of water and in the five people who approached the waves and allowed themselves to be chased by them. What fun we had! Through the roar of the waves people could hear our shouting and laughter.

These then were the 'teachers' and the refined 'princesses' who were running and skipping with tangled hair and flapping clothes! It was so wonderful, so really, really young and playful. Our carriage attendants and a few passers-by stood still to stare at us with open mouths. The next morning we went to the beach again – the sea had lost its fury – calmly, peacefully, the infinite stretch of water reflecting the clear blue sky stretched before us, disturbed only by the merest ripples. Sunlight danced like diamonds on the water's surface that reflected the beautiful blue of the sky. We went into the water, the bottom was smooth, without stones, without seaweed, without mud. We went in a long way till the water reached up to our chin. The babu on the beach became

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28 The reference is to the emotional upheaval caused by the marriage and departure of her sister Kardinah.

29 The reference is to EC Abendanon.

30 Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940), *Gösta Berlings Saga* (1891).

31 The reference is to Annie Glaser.

anxious – we could no longer hear each other, we had gone so far. She ran about like a mad thing, waving her arms, calling us back. And we laughed at her fear. From the distance she could see the 5 heads drifting about – we were dancing, and our lively singing echoed over the water. Rejuvenated we left the water and brought home a huge appetite.

After a solid breakfast Anne sat at the piano. From the fullness of her heart she played a song of gratitude and we joined in. In the meantime it was already 11 o'clock. Then quickly to work – on the rear veranda the painting box stood ready. The five of us sat around the table and were immediately hard at it, not only were the fingers busy but also the mouths never stopped, there was constant talking and laughter and singing. Time passed in a flash and we were again sitting down at the table. In the afternoon we took a short trip and then went for a walk to the beach.

After a walk, at least if it has not yet become too dark, a drink of tea in the garden, amidst the greenery and the flowers and above us a beautiful blue sky with several stars and the pale golden moon. And after that, reading together or making music. If Anne plays the piano then we usually sit down to do our needlework or write. Working like that. accompanied by music, is wonderful – tasks are completed effortlessly. Cooking is also part of this programme. We do that after rijsttafel. Why do you both not come over, to take a rest from Batavia. Go on, why don't you? We will revive you. We will let you enjoy real desa life, so peaceful, so quiet, calm and pleasant, we will provide the life and we will be supported in this by the trees, the wind, the sea, the birds which always greet us in the morning with a concert.[32]

Come over, dear Friends, come to our peaceful and quiet little place to regain your energies!

The person who would be utterly happy should you ever come here again would be Anneke. She is so longing to see you both. Just for that reason she would like to go to Batavia. That child is also so taken up by thoughts of our own dear Angel!

How very sad that the exhibition will now not take place.[33] Is the box now on its way to your future daughter-in-law, Marie; who is she, you have not told us? Would you do so on a future occasion? I only hope she will be enraptured by the present from her future parents-in-law. I will send you the description you requested in due course. Now I am unable to do so. But you will get it, never fear, you can count on it.

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[32] This account was designed to entertain the dispirited recipient as well as entice her visit.

[33] In her article, 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje' (1903) Kartini mentions an exhibition held by Oost en West in June 1902.

At the moment we are busy doing this and that for our Kleintje. From her you learned the date of her departure didn't you? She wrote to you from here. She asked me to pass on to you both her heartiest greetings and also to brother Edie, and to ask you, from now on, to write to her only about everyday things which can be understood by everyone – he reads all her letters and it could happen that he might not understand something and then misinterpret it.

The day before yesterday we received her first letter. So, finally, she is in her new house. She has been experiencing extremely tiring days. She wrote in good spirits, everything has been better than she had expected, it is a large house with 10 rooms and all very neat and tidy. And she is overjoyed about the children, sweet little poppets with whom she was immediately good friends.[34]

While she was still here she had asked him to arrange for the children to be brought to Tegal so that she could meet them as soon as she arrived. He was so surprised, he had not expected this. He immediately wrote home requesting his parents to fulfil her wishes. Uncle however had other ideas, believing the children were not appropriate at such an occasion, they would just be a *burden* to the young couple. Only her oldest son who was living-in with his grandparents met our sister on her arrival. It was this little man that we had been most afraid of; spoiled and ruined as he had been by his grandparents, we feared sister may have had difficulty with him. But no such thing, he is a dear, sincere boy and is very much taken by his 'moedertje'. He just cannot be separated from our sister. He wanted to go with her to Pemalang[35] but his grandparents would not allow him. It is a pity, our sister would have gladly taken him with her and for the boy himself it would have been better. When his moeder wrote to us he also wanted to contribute and at the top of her letter he scribbled a few words. He introduced himself to his aunts and said he was already able to sing. Our sister was also immediately good friends with the two others, girls of 5 and 3. They follow their moedertje around everywhere and are always under her feet.

Our sister is so happy and so grateful about this. And so are we! – that the children are making her task so much easier. God grant it may remain so.

Our sister immediately asked whether she could send the children to school – the oldest who is at present attending the Fröbel school[36] will go to the Government school in June and the girls will also do so later, but for the time

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34 The reference is to Kardinah's husband's children by other wives.

35 At the time Kardinah's husband, a cousin, was the wedono in Pemalang before being promoted to replace his father as Regent of Tegal.

36 Fröbel classes in the colony and the Netherlands were aimed to prepare children for elementary school. In Java importantly, it prepared eligible Javanese children to reach an appropriate level of Dutch language proficiency to enable them to enter the Government (Dutch language) elementary school.

being they will have to receive lessons from their moedertje at home. Our sister is allowed everything, can retain all her former interests – only one thing she may not engage in and that is dancing.

Her parents-in-law are just mad about her. She wrote about it and uncle wrote about it. He wrote to father about his 'Dientje'.[37] We think that name is awful: this is an example of being civilized, to give his children Dutch names! Papa-in-law thinks of her not as a human being but as a supernatural one.

The entire week our sister was in Tegal where they did nothing else but look at her, she was not without them for a moment. She was not allowed to do anything, they did everything for her. She was touched by their heartiness and all the signs of their affection. And we are grateful. Of course there was no lack of spectacle and show – neither here nor there, nor anywhere where they have been. From here to Tegal and Pemalang they travelled as though on a tour of honour – at each place where they stopped to visit family, they were feted. Sis is so exhausted, so tired of all that sparkle – but it had to be, she wrote. Further she wrote that it had been difficult parting from our Father who had taken her as far as Kudus.[38]

She surprised herself that she was able to keep herself so well under control. 'So you see,' she wrote, 'I have become old, old in my way of thinking, in my feelings, in my way of doing things.' Others, including Annie, also made the same comment: 'She has aged, she is so earnest, so resigned. It is no longer the Weemie of old, it was somebody else who left.'

He openly admitted that he was less than she was and of an inferior position to her. He hoped that she would draw him up to her level, would educate him further and teach him Dutch. She would have to enlighten him. He had had a governess, his pronunciation of Dutch is good but he speaks less well. He is interested in music, plays almost every instrument, especially piano, which he has learnt very well. He used to play at musical recitals but has not involved himself in this for a long time. Sis will get a piano from her papa-in-law and now he wants to learn anew with her. Nice for our sister, she is so fond of piano as you know.[39]

About the wedding here I will just say that our little sister was a beautiful bride.[40] She married in a wayang costume and looked very fine; in the evening

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37 This is diminutive form of a popular late nineteenth century Dutch girl's name.

38 That is, her father took her as far as the steam tram terminus.

39 The Regent of Tegal along with her uncle, the Regent of Demak, her father, and her later husband were amongst the few Western educated, Dutch speaking Javanese regents at the turn of the century.

40 The following critical account can be compared to her long 'ethnographic' account detailed in her letter to Hilda dated 21 March 1902. See Part Two.

at the reception, she appeared as a fairytale princess from the thousand-and-one nights. She wore a golden crown and was veiled. It was like a fairy tale! This was something new, and will no doubt be imitated.

Resident Sijthoff[41] who had wanted to see sister once more as a young girl attended the whole affair. He had very much wanted to shake her by the hand for the last time as a young girl but that had not been possible; he had only been able to greet her with his eyes. She sat as though sculpted from stone before the shining golden throne, sitting perfectly straight, her head held proudly, eyes looking straight ahead, staring at her future which was about to be revealed! The usual tears were shed, especially papa-in-law was very moved, yet both she and we remained calm, cold and unmoved. Neither gamelan, nor music nor incense, nor the perfume of flowers was able to bring alive in us any emotion.

We were cold. One had imagined the parting to be terrible and we were surprised. We had many observers – and still have many observers. People are curious to see how we conduct ourselves. Well they can see – we are calm.

When Mr. Sijthoff was here that afternoon to witness the ceremony, he suddenly asked me without the least warning or provocation: 'Would you want to marry someone you did not love?' I looked him straight in the face and you can guess what my answer was. Of course he did not agree with me. 'We too,' he said, 'should do as the Javanese do, our daughters should marry the man who we have selected for her. Parents can choose more wisely.' I said nothing – I kept my arguments to him for another occasion.

Just before he arrived he had written to me. His intentions were good – we did not doubt that he meant well – but it pained me. We would, we must, speak with him, that very evening. And we did speak with him. Just imagine, in the middle of all the festivities, we spoke about a matter that was so serious, and so tender. But it was the only opportunity to speak with him alone, and we had to get a move on! Alone! And around us there were people and still more people. In the middle of the greenery and the flowers, the shine of satin and the glitter of gold and jewelry, the murmur of voices and in a sea of bright light, just before the toast given by the R. – to speak about such serious matters.

Already beforehand we knew he would ridicule us or at least think us 'crazy'. But we did not let this daunt us. He spoke to me first, then to Roekmini – to be sure we were not just imitating each other. He frequently left us in a

[41] Kartini's detailed description here and elsewhere of this senior colonial official's behaviour seems quite extraordinary and largely edited out in the 1911 publication.

not very friendly mood, but then he would return to begin the conversation again. In his toast he said to our sister: 'Raden Ajeng Kardinah, istri untung sekali, kawin sama yang di ani blakang menjadi orang besar.[42] Well, he merely voiced the thoughts of almost everyone in attendance. A compliment to the bridegroom, all that is known of him is that he will become an important 'mijnheer'! Our sister understood nothing of his fine words that brought a tear to many an eye; she knew only from the chorus of hoorays that the speech had ended and it was time to clink glasses.

I do not know how many times after the toast the R[esident] came back to us. Time and again he assured us that he was very fond of us and wanted very much to see us happy. For that reason he would very much like to see us married. He would like nothing better than to see us happily married. To this subject our conversation regularly returned: 'We must marry!' We became tired of it. When I spoke to him of going to Holland he simply laughed at me, but after a while he asked whether we already knew of someone with whom we could travel. And later he said that he thought it a pity that he did not have a wife. If he had a wife then he would take us to Europe and take us everywhere. I told him that he could always do this, he had better marry!

He began by ridiculing us and ended by asking me if on some suitable occasion I would take a long walk with him, it did not matter where. Sitting opposite each other in this fashion, one was not at one's ease, while walking, when one did not look the other directly in the face, one was freer, unpressured and speaking would be much easier. And, great news! We are not frivolous. 'We are so different from other girls! We are so serious.' Did you know this dearest? This we heard for the first time that evening from Mr Sijthoff. Goodness me and we had always thought that we were the greatest flirts! We have a poetic nature, have hearts of poetry! What a discovery in our old age. The Res. had something in mind with me – 'matchmaking plans'. It gave me such pain, such pain.[43]

Anneke was there when he said these certain things to me, having asked beforehand if Anne was a friend of ours. Anne told me later that she had never seen me so angry as when Mr S. asked me that question. No doubt that is true, I was simply furious. When he finished speaking I responded with only a few words, but enough to make my meaning quite clear. He said

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42 The Javanese sentence translates: 'Raden Ajeng Kardinah, you are a very fortunate wife, you have married a man of humble birth who will become an important person.'

43 The scene being described is quite extraordinary with overtones of intimacy and clearly could not have been included in the 1911 publication.

nothing and left to return a little later to propose that walk to me. He even asked us to come with him to Semarang, which of course was not possible.

Oh, his intentions were good enough, it is just that he is not used to intelligent and sensitive Javanese women, or rather, girls. What his opinion about it all is now, we do not know; he did not reveal his thoughts but at least he now knows how we view things and that we are very serious. No doubt he thinks we are uncontrollable and detestable creatures, good enough only to be trampled on, so there!

On leaving he told us to write him a long letter soon. To others he has said that he just did not dare (!!!) answer my letters because he was no stylist! What nonsense. He also told me he was somewhat embarrassed to write to me because he did not have a very good writing style. Don't you think that is rather lame? What use is this to us? This will not advance us in the least. He asked Anneke what I would most like to have and she told him that he knew very well what my dearest wish was.

He also tried to get to know from us if there was someone we were fond of, or had been fond of. If he had a son he would have to marry me. I was on the point of saying something but Anne, who was there and heard the conversation, was ahead of me: 'Your son might well be jilted, Resident!' Anne regretted having said it but she was so disgusted with everything she had heard up to that point. She was frightened that he might just devour her.

'You must,' he said to me, 'you must, I command it.'

'Must I, Resident, must I?' I asked innocently. 'I don't consider myself some kind of common commodity.'

But inwardly I had to laugh how silly we all were to make a fuss about something when it did not exist: Sijthoff junior is after all just a figment of the imagination! He had told Annie something which we ourselves had not known: 'A naval officer had asked for our sister, and had been told by Father it was impossible, since sister was already the bride of another.'[44] Oh, so that was why Mr S. did not like us to come on board warships. We had known about others who had enquired from friends of ours about the same thing. We were present when those friends told Father, we held our breath, fearing that from then on we would be denied contact with Europeans, which would be terrible, terrible, and which we would regard as a great catastrophe. Thank goodness Father just laughed it off, Mama too, when she came to hear of it. There is no danger of that, dear parents of mine!

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[44] This possibly relates to the visit of naval officers mentioned in her letter to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer November 1899 and described in her short story, 'A Governor General's Day'.

How do you like that: Mr S. would very much like to have me on my knees before him, he would be so proud![45] He would then raise me to his level!!!

Poor thing, we teased him terribly that evening. His ears were ringing with it; he developed a headache, and was unable to sleep – terrible things that we are, we just deliver headaches to people who have good intentions towards us and are kind enough to interest themselves in us. The moral is 'Leave the daughters of the Regent of Jepara alone.'

Heer Van Kol will come to visit us. He had asked Father's permission to visit when he was still in Holl.[46] We very much hope that he really will come. Friends of ours from Holl. who had come here to say farewell to the 'Land of the Sun' were to come to visit us one day but Mijnheer is not well and on doctor's advice they had to return to Europe as quickly as possible. Another big disappointment. We would so much have liked to have met and talked with them. Fortunately Father was able to speak to the husband briefly in Semarang. We do not know Mevrouw but he is a dear hearty old gentleman, had been a friend of Grandfather's. We are very fond of him and he of us. They had initially planned to return to Europe in the summer.

Sister's address is now: Raden Ayu Patih Reksoharyono, Pemalang. She is so pleased with your wonderful and beautiful mementos. She received many beautiful and useful things. Papa-in-law and son were very pleased when they saw these presents, especially when they were able to conclude from them who her friends and acquaintances were. How happy our sister will be that you have all written in her album. When we get one, may we also send it to you? Ours is in Holl. and we think we will not see it back again unless we go to collect it ourselves!! We are collecting fine sayings that we want to include in the book, or transcribe. It gives us such pleasure! If only we could go to Holland to study! What do you think would be better for us: that we should go or that we should stay here? Will you give us an answer to this? Because you cannot see my face as I am writing this, I will tell you that I am asking it very nicely and am looking at you very sweetly![47]

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45 The resident was unmarried and Kartini implies that he behaved much like any other European colonial man despite his rank.

46 Van Kol's visit would take place during his extensive study tour of the Indies undertaken during 1902 in his capacity as parliamentary leader of the Social Democratc Workers Party and leading spokesman on colonial reform. His observations were subsequently published in *Uit Onze Koloniën* (1903) which included serious criticism of the administration of the resident of Semarang.

47 Here Kartini crystallizes her dilemma, which she had already referred to several times the previous year, regarding the wisdom of going to the Netherlands. She eventually resolves it, with the encouragement of Abendanon, by deciding to stay in Java and train as a teacher in Batavia.

Another big request I must make – would you be so kind when you next see your friend Dr Snouck Hurgronje[48] to ask His Honour if amongst Muslims there are laws concerning adulthood, as with you. Or would I be allowed to contact His Honour directly myself to obtain the information. I would so very much like some information about rights and duties – or better still, laws dealing with Muslim women and daughters. A nice state of affairs – I should be ashamed that we do not know this ourselves. But – keep them stupid, ignorant, then you retain authority, maintain the power in your own hand!

We know so very, so extremely, little! We regret so much that the idea for a girls' H.B.S. is being abandoned.[49] It is terrible!

Please give our regards to Mej. v. Loon[50] should you see her again.

And now, goodnight my dearest! Give our heartiest greetings to all members of your household. You are warmly kissed on both cheeks by sister Roekmini and your own,

Kartini otherwise
Trinil[51] (nice!)

Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

28 February 1902

Hello my dearest Mevrouw, here I am again at last! How are you all – I so hope you are as well as we are here, because here everything is going from better to best. At last I have come with the list of books for the course for the Assistant's Certificate. It is very long. I was shocked and am embarrassed to send it to you. But you said you wanted it, did you not, and I am superstitious (blood runs true) and I attach value, significance to the consequences of everything that surrounds me. I have the idea that objects from people whom I wholeheartedly respect, love and honour will bring me blessings! With your books I will certainly study with more enjoyment and gusto and I hope, with more confidence.

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48 Snouck Hurgronje was then Colonial Adviser on Islam and Native Affairs. He was internationally recognized as an authority on Islam and had become famous for his advice on managing the colonial war in Aceh. The answer Kartini received led to her trenchant criticism of current Western scholarship.

49 The plan to establish a European Hogere Burger School (HBS) for girls which, as for the boys' HBS, would be open to all races, was another of Abendanon's plans rejected by the conservative central bureaucracy.

50 It has not been possible to identify this person.

51 Trinil: a little bird.

Do you not think me silly now? I am after all nothing more than a big child (!) who longs for lots of love, who so very much wants to learn to be able to understand. We want that very much. To understand is a very difficult thing, is it not dearest, very difficult to attain for those who do not have an innate ability for it. Understanding judges kindly – forgives – and makes good. My most heartfelt thanks, my dearest, for your willingness to teach us to understand.

It is Friday evening, gamelan evening, they are playing our favourite pieces! The ice around our hearts has melted, the pale sun has warmed our cold hearts with kisses. Now they are again able to be involved. Our souls once more soar up to the blue heavens of our imagination on the sweet, serene tones which the soft evening breeze brings us from the pendopo. Dream on, dream on – dream for as long as you can! If there were no dreams what would life then be worth? Reality is usually so hard! Perhaps it is true, we really should live alone on an uninhabited island. But that would be pure egotism would it not? I believe we must live with and for the people. That I believe is the purpose of life, to make Life beautiful.

What pretentious talk – so let us quickly put an end to it and begin with something else! Are you progressing well with your painting? Have you already begun a new one? Our sister has asked for her drawing and painting things. Have you already sent her the small book and have you heard from her since? It was always said of her that she was a soft, sweet girl. She would laugh about it and say: 'If only they knew, eh, Yu! Cat's paws are no doubt soft but beneath the velvet skin the sharp nails are hidden!' But now 'they' are right, she is indeed soft. She has become so. Soft and good-spirited.

Suffering strengthens, at least if the person is well made; in the opposite case, it diminishes. We have also changed – how? The future will tell. We only know that we are no longer the carefree children we were. We have removed all the trifles from our room and made the children happy with them – the jolly girls' room exists no longer – there, where so much was dreamed, thought, felt! – celebrated, battled, suffered! Only our bookcase has remained unaffected and our old friends continue to smile down at us in their friendly, kind and encouraging way.

One of our best friends, an old one whom no one pays much attention to any more because to do so is old fashioned, can be seen immediately one opens its cover. Our dear, loyal old friend, many pull up their noses at it, but we love it, this old friend, who has never left us, who celebrated with us in happy days and who in our grief-stricken and dark days comforts, supports

and cheers us up: it is … De GENESTET.[52] It has in recent times offered us much comfort.

I shall not make this long otherwise it will only be lying about. Goodbye dearest, kind friend! Warmest greetings from all of us to Mijnheer, your Sister and to brother Edie. For yourself, a hearty kiss from little R. and your own,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

5 March 1902

Dearest Mevrouw,

With this, we include the wayang story from which the figures carved on the box for your prospective daughter-in-law were taken.[53] Do not regard it as a literary work, for that my pen is too unqualified, we tried merely to meet your requirements, to tell briefly the story from which the wayang figures were taken. Should there be anything else about which you would wish some information then I am always ready to provide it for you. I have only provided five explanations for five representations – the 6th, that is, the one on the front that has the lock, is still lacking. This is because the drawings were accidently destroyed and none of us can remember which figures were represented on it. I regret it terribly. When we had the box made we considered giving you the names of all the wayang figures which were represented together with the descriptions but what with all the confusion of the previous months we were not able to carry this out.

Do you know who always draws the wayangs for us? You will never guess. A gamelan player of ours. Amazing, how capable he is and how neat! But it seems that the ability to draw is innate in Jepara – young kacongs, karbouw boys draw wayang figures beautifully in the sand, on walls, on bridges and bridge railings. The wall behind our house is constantly covered with scribbled wayang figures. If the bridge railings were whitewashed today then tomorrow they would already be full of wayang figures – drawn with charcoal or some small piece of red brick by those naked and muddy monkeys. It certainly is easy for us to find someone able to sketch in our neighbourhood – if we want something done, then all we have to do is ask and explain what we want.

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52 The early 19th century poet, De Genestet, remained popular despite being considered outdated by proponents of the cultural movement inaugurated by the Tachtigers, the literary group that emerged in the 1880s.

53 There is no archival record of this piece.

At the moment the woodcarver is engaged in something beautiful, namely a bookcase made of jati wood with sono wood edging. The door, made from one large glass pane, will be held in place in a double frame, two small carved strips of wood set at small intervals joined by wayang representations and made of jati wood and, at the bottom, the frames are joined by serpents appearing to be attacking each other. The top section will be carved with wayang figures with some further embellishments. This section is supported near the door by pillars of inlaid carved sono wood.[54]

We saw something similar in Mantingan, the grave of the Sultan of Mantigan[55] (it is about half an hour's riding from here) not woodcarving but plaster work and cemented to the walls. They are ancient designs deriving from China where the Sultan had been. There is a whole story related to it. It is a holy grave, we sometimes go there. A Chinese came out with the Sultan from China – he is also buried here. Next to his grave a pace tree is growing. A magical power has been ascribed to the tree. Childless women who very much want to have a child go there and bring the Sultan offerings of flowers and incense. If a pace fruit falls on the grave of the Chinese, the women have to gather it, make rujak from it and eat it. Their wish will then be fulfilled. The names of the people who have been helped in this way were mentioned to us.

Edie is correct, the Javanese are a people of myths and legends. We will see if the Ratu of Solo, to whom a piece from Mantigan is being sent, will benefit. It is said that the children with whom the Sultan of Mantigan blesses childless women are all girls! Poor childless women! We will search for a holy grave that will bless the world with boys – there are already too many women in the world!

Goodness how I have been wandering – I was writing about the cupboard and completely forgot about it. This beautiful piece of furniture is meant for Kardinah, a present from the Ovink family. Sister is lucky! I would also like to have such a thing, but I will be waiting for some time for that. But it is possible that R. and I will each receive a screen, the necessary wood has already arrived. Last month two fire screens were completed for a controleur who is going to Holland. Beautiful pieces, also carved with wayang figures – one made in three sections – is made completely from jati wood and another, made from one piece of jati wood, is in a dark sono wood frame. Just beautiful! You should have one made, you certainly will not regret it. A fire screen is rather an extravagance here but it is for Europe, later! After all, you had been

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54 This account can be compared to her article, 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje' (1903).

55 Mantigan was one of the Nine Wali, the saints revered as the founders of Islam in Java.

planning to order some things – just tell me what you want to order, then the woodcarvers will begin working for you as soon as they have completed what they have on hand at the moment.

Yesterday I received a nice letter from Mevrouw de Bruijn[56] containing a request to have a box like yours made. It is wonderful that there is so much demand for our Jepara woodcarving. But imagine what criticism we have received: corruption has entered the Jepara woodcarving industry because the daughter of a highly placed Native official continually requests the woodcarvers to follow European models and motifs! This appeared in one of the papers. We were dumbfounded when we heard it since we had always thought that wayang was specifically an Indies motif, and now it seems that we were mistaken, it was European, because they were models and motifs derived from what was at the Kabupaten. But to make a mistake is only human, is it not? And we are only human and Javanese at that. It was a real struggle to convince our artists to carve wayang figures. They were terrified that the wayang spirits would be angry with them. Only when Father assured them that Father would take all the responsibility and that the fury and revenge of the gods would only affect him, only trouble him, and not them, who were only carrying out orders, were they prepared to do it. How amusing it was![57] It goes like this in many things.

It was also difficult to have several photos taken of the kampong. Superstition has it that one's life would be cut short if one allowed a photo to be taken of oneself and that the photographer is a greater sinner – all the photographs he has taken will, in the afterlife, ask him for life. When we arrived in a kampong with a photographer, several women began to cry but when finally there was one bold one who dared, they dried their tears and when we returned on another occasion later, they offered themselves to be photographed.

It is like this in everything, is it not dearest? One person has to dare to set an example!

Sister R. is busy doing a portrait of sister K. as a bride. She drew from memory. The upper lip and nose are still not right but the remainder will do, especially the bridal vestments sister has done very nicely. She will attempt to copy it on to a plate in the manner you described to us once. It is a pity that my sister did the drawing on such a poor scrap of paper. She made a nice portrait of sister Kartinah in her sketchbook. Nice don't you think that she does all

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56 This person could not be identified.

57 The criticism, not further elaborated on by Kartini, reflected Dutch 'specialists' concerns about the loss of 'authenticity' due to European and Chinese influence. The craftsmen may have been troubled by the Islamic prohibition on the representation of human figures rather than any 'superstition'.

these things without having been taught but she also is a child of Jepara where even karbouw boys can draw. What a privileged land Jepara is. You do not know how proud we are of our district. And many people who were required to come here cursed Destiny that had brought them to this godforsaken place. A difference of taste!

Now just briefly the 'question of conceit'. A while ago I asked a Dutch writer her opinion about … my Dutch. Last week I received a letter from her and enclosed in it was a letter from another Dutch lady to whom she had just mentioned her opinion of my Dutch when she received my letter. How co-incidental and nice! I was of course pleased! A week earlier I received, through the intervention of a friend, from another Dutch lady, an editor of a progressive women's journal, an invitation to be a correspondent for her publication[58] – to write a letter for it each fortnight. My friend had spoken about us to that lady and she was very supportive of our struggle and was very keen to do something for the Jav. women through the medium of her journal. She was also of the opinion that in order to give the Hollanders a better insight into the Javanese people, and to instil a sympathy for them, the voice of a child of the people itself should be heard. I would love to do it, but of course I must first have Father's permission and I am hopeful of getting it. If I am allowed, then you will not say anything about it, will you dearest? I would prefer to remain anonymous.

And now dearest, goodnight! Give our warm greetings to Mijnheer, your Sister and Edie brother, and you yourself receive a hearty kiss from sister R. and your own, devoted

K.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

14 March 1902

There is an expression of such concern in your letter. Do not concern yourself, dearest, no one has hurt me. It was myself, stupid, silly me, who caused myself pain. I took pleasure in delving into my own wounds. Don't you think that is very silly? Oh, the practice implicit in the idea, 'through suffering to glory', is so hard.

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58 The reference is to Henriette van der Meij who was the editor of *Belang en Recht* (Issues of Importance and Justice), a leading Dutch feminist periodical published by the Comité tot Verbetering van de Maatschappij en de Rechtstoestand der Vrouwen in Nederland (Committee for the Improvement of the Social and Legal Position of Women in the Netherlands). See also the reference to Mej van der Meij in the following letter.

I wrote to you in my last letter about my sister. It is such a hard loss, we miss our soul sister in everything. Fortunately we constantly receive bright letters from her. Oh, she is such a dear, noble child! She is worth more than the two of us together. Things are going well in her new home and she has experienced much goodwill from the public. Her new family adores her and wherever she goes she has experienced a warm welcome and much kindness from both natives as well as from Europeans. Europeans expect from her that she will educate the wives of native officials. Sister will be able to do much for our cause.

You will know what position her husband has from her wedding announcement that we sent you: a Patih. His is one rung from the highest position in the native civil service; moreover, our brother-in-law is designated to become Regent. As wife of a Regent, Sister will be able to do much for the development of native women, more than we will be able to do. And we are confident that her husband will assist her in this; at least he was very much in support of Mr Abendanon's plans. He is very nice to his young wife, has a cheerful and bright personality and a sympathetic heart. He provides for a large number of poor relatives. That's nice, don't you think? But this is generally the case: those who are well off concern themselves for their poorer neighbours. There is hardly a single native official who does not have a number of poor relatives with him whom he provides for.

So are you now satisfied about Sister's situation, my little woman? She is only rather afraid because so much is expected of her, just like her older sister who never feels her failings more than when a certain someone in Holland (Amsterdam) sings her praises. Really, Stella, you must not do that, I will disappoint you so much should the most fortunate of all fortunate constellations send me to your arms. You have much too high an opinion of me, my nature and my intellect. These are, to tell you the truth, not worth a farthing, I mean it. But what will not disappoint you, my little woman, is my love for you!

Recently I received a letter from an old gentleman who talked about my 'kind heart', my 'sweet nature', my 'skilfulness with the Dutch language'.[59] I smiled wanly to myself when I read that and thought 'If only you knew!' He came out at the end of last year and was planning to visit us last month but

[59] Other contemporaries who wrote about their first meeting, including Abendanon, Hilda de Booij and Adriani, made the same comment. Kartini mentions she was aware of the existence of numerous Dutch educated women in Java amongst women of the aristocracy. She was, however, critical both of Europeans who merely considered such women as 'interesting' and those Javanese who simply regarded western education as an ornament.

Fate would have it otherwise; as a result of illness he suddenly had to return to Europe together with his wife and take his leave from the Land of the Sun.

We regret it very much; we had so much wanted to meet him and discuss our plans with him. When a little while ago there was talk of the possibility of our going to Holland to study, we had thought, had hoped, to return to Europe with that family. Alas! That hope has now vanished. Yesterday we received a letter from Holland and I said to myself: 'Well, old fellow, chin up, it certainly will not be the only disappointment that life will bring you; you had better believe that the future will have many more in store for you!'[60] And I got over it. Life naturally teaches one to remain calm.

And now regarding the suggestion of Mejuffrouw van der Meij.[61] First of all, thank you heartily, my true comrade, for what you have done for me, and I also thank you for sending me *Belang en Recht*. I took your letter in to Father and read to him the proposal you made. Father first wants to await the arrival of van Kol[62] before making any decision on this matter. I am very hopeful of his permission.

Do I still need to tell you that I want to? You know that writing has always attracted me and I can only believe that I have a talent for it as you have so often assured me. Yes Stella, I want to, but not under my own name, I want to remain anonymous, please tell that to Mejuffrouw van der Meij. Although that will not be of much help here in the Indies – if one hears about articles written by a Javanese woman people will soon know who the writer was. It is a nuisance; I do not like to be spoken to about the fruits of my pen (all failures) and especially not if all I hear is praise, bah! A Dutch-writing Javanese woman is considered interesting, that is the secret of easy success. Very nice for me!

But do not let me ignore the advantages connected with this 'being interesting'. It certainly has its advantages. Yes Stella, I and others believe together with you that it could do a lot of good if a child of the people speaks, if a Javanese woman herself points out the weal and woe of her world.

There is so much bitter suffering in our wretched women's world. But before I raise my voice in protest against all the injustice in our world, I must consider, I must know what I am doing; in protesting I will incur the wrath

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60 It is not clear what specific piece of bad news Kartini was referring to.

61 Stella suggested that Kartini writes articles about the situation of Javanese women for this leading progressive journal and Kartini reports (letter 15 August 1902) that she was busy with 'an article for *Belang en Recht*' as well as writing fairy tales for Nellie van Kol.

62 It appears that Stella, who was a member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, had convinced van Kol to visit to Jepara. See the letter of 17 May 1902 for an account of the visit.

of all those who gain advantage from the injustices against which I go into battle. Personally that enmity does not concern me but it could damage our cause. When I have become a teacher that fact could perhaps discourage many parents from entrusting their children to me since I was undermining centuries-old institutions. Father would not give me permission to publish such writing, at least not yet.

The opportunity to do so has been offered me many times before and I was not allowed.

But what Mejuffrouw van der Meij has proposed is something else; I am hopeful that I will be allowed. But as I said, anonymity will be the condition. Writing for the public in this manner is also something a friend of ours had suggested to me: I should write pieces on topics for discussion, even for debate in the Second Chamber, so that a Parliamentary enquiry might be instituted.[63]

You see, how love makes one blind? As a friend do not expect so much from me. It has always been my intention to publish such things but I feel myself that now is not yet the time to bring this plan to fruition; I do not yet feel strong enough for this, I still lack a lot of information. I have to see more, to hear more and to thoroughly digest it all, to give it all my deep consideration. The fruit is not yet ripe, Stella. When it is I will not hesitate a moment longer to reveal it to the public.

Should we turn to the Queen then it would not be to seek the assistance of the Monarch in order to gain Royal intervention in obtaining state aid, but we would be asking the Queen privately for her personal assistance. If you knew how proud we are then you would know what a struggle it would be for us to come to a decision to ask for help. But as you say, where important interests are at stake, the lesser ones must remain silent. And we will ignore our pride in the interests of matters of greater importance.

We have always found it terrible to ask even if we knew we would not be refused but on this occasion asking is our only chance of success. Someone who has spoken with both the Queens has assured me that the Queen Mother also takes a close interest in the Indies and that H. M. has an amazingly good understanding of much that is happening here in the Indies.[64] And we can readily believe it. When on the occasion of the Women's Exhibition I sent

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63 Towards the end of the year Kartini received a series of questions from a Dutch parliamentary representative through the intermediary of Annie Glaser regarding possible reforms to which she replied in a memorandum of January 1903 included in this volume.

64 The reference is to Queen Wilhelmina and her mother, Queen Emma, who was regent between 1890 and 1898.

several pieces to the Queen, it was the Queen Mother who sent her private secretary to the President of the Insulinde section to ask her about our present.[65] It was H. M. who, during the Exhibition, asked the President to escort her, to read some lines from our letter to her.[66]

It will have to be either the Government or the Queen, one or the other. And if both refuse then in God's name let it then be Mojowarno,[67] even if this does not happen to be my heart's desire. But in any case that will be better than being dependent on the family or a forced marriage. All equally terrible, equally awful, equally humiliating. You know what I sometimes long for when I feel utterly despondent? To go to the Outer Islands to our friend who lives deep, deep in the heart of the inland, amongst head-hunters who he helps in all kinds of ways, especially with medical help.[68] I would come to him like a bird with tired wings and he would caress my tired head until my gasps for breath and moaning had subsided and something of the peace which radiates from him flowed from his hand and through into me. Yet he is only a human being, has his own times of depression and struggle.

Stella, Stella, if only I could wrap my arms about you for a moment, just rest my head against your heart. Perhaps I will still go to Celebes, to our friend and the head-hunters.[69]

It makes no difference how one serves the Good Cause, as long as it is good. Oh no, no, do not be afraid, do not think about it, Stella dearest, it will probably not be necessary and the difficult puzzle will probably still be solved in an agreeable way. There is still enough willpower and energy in me, thank God!

Hope for the best, be optimistic and love me still, dearest.

K

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65 The Queen Mother's interest in the 'Native exhibits' at the Exhibition of Women's Work in 1898 was widely reported at the time and helped generate popular interest in the colony. The term 'Insulinde' was widely used in 'progressive' colonial circles at the time instead of Nederlandsch Oost Indië (Netherlands East Indies).

66 This was the event that initially brought Kartini to the attention of the social and political circles in the Netherlands interested in colonial reform.

67 This option of training as a midwife or doctor at the mission hospital in Mojowarno had been suggested by Mevrouw Ovink-Soer and possibly encouraged by Dr Adriani.

68 This is a reference to Dr Nicolaus Adriani. The Christian mission was headed by Albert Kruyt, whose father and brother administered the mission at Mojowarno.

69 The reference is again to Adriani and the mission in Central Sulawesi whose inhabitants, about whom nothing was known prior to Kruyt and Adriani's publications, were thought to be savage 'head-hunters'.

Hilda de Booij-Boissevain

21 March 1902

Dear Hilda[70]

You will be wondering what has become of me; not having heard from me while you have been writing such dear and hearty letters. It is more than scandalous.

As so often happens it has been a case of postponement and waiting for a better opportunity. But let me not spend time on explanations. It won't absolve my guilt. Rather let me apologize and promise myself not to repeat it and now make up for the long silence with a decent letter.

It gave me great satisfaction to learn that all is well there with you.

Dear Hilda, what a nasty time you experienced in Java's blue mountains – luckily that wretched time is now behind you! Hearty congratulations Hilda dearest, with your complete recovery. Wonderful that your boys are now doing well, that they are so healthy and growing. I will not be able to carry Tommy, your treasure, when I see him again. If his father makes another photo of him and Freddy I would be very pleased to get a copy. How I would love to see them in the flesh, Tommy and Freddy. But that will remain one of the many silent wishes of a certain old miss unless their dear parents make the tiring journey with their sons to Jepara. Is there any chance of this, dear mama?

If I could, how I would love to fly to Buitenzorg to see you all again for a moment before you returned to that far-off land where we also would dearly love to go but that is unreachable for us, alas! Only a miracle would magically transfer us there and, ah, the days of miracles are long past!

Is your husband's period of service in the Indies coming to an end soon, Hilda? I hope that when you are in your country again you will not forget the Land of the Sun and also occasionally think of your Javanese acquaintances who will continue to remember warmly their Dutch acquaintances even though they are separated from each other by a great ocean.[71] We still think back so often to that beautiful Buitenzorg, it would have been heavenly to have stayed longer. Another pious dream.

In my album there is a snap that your husband took of all of us in that glorious garden, by the pond with the flowering lotuses. It has faded rather badly but I wouldn't dream of throwing it away since there are so many memories attached to it. It is so like an old spinster to value such old memories.

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70 Parts of this letter deleted in 1911 were included in an appendix of letter extracts published in the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* edited by Elisabeth Allard.

71 In fact Hilda later did much to commemorate the name of Kartini and to raise funds for the Kartini schools.

At the moment we are all doing well here, and just as well because we have had our full share of miseries. Almost the entire family lay at death's door and I had the 'honour' to bring the row of miseries to an end. Brrr! I have just about had everything, even cholera. But now, thank God, all that suffering is behind us and I can now fortunately take my place as a healthy person amongst all those so dear to me, even healthier than I was before which I am very pleased about because I didn't think I would get on top of it so quickly, it was so bad. I am inclined to believe that with my return to good health I have also gained a new constitution (!!!) stronger, more energetic than the old one.

I thank you sincerely, dear Hilda, for your congratulatory wishes with sister's marriage.

You are right. Sister's departure has been a great loss to us, we were together and very close for so long. Quite correctly it was said that we three had become one, one in thought and one in feelings. It has not yet sunk into us that Sister has left us for good: the idea that she has gone away and will not return is unbearable. We are still imagining that she has just gone to stay somewhere for a while and will be coming back one day.

We miss Kleintje a lot. But the best thing will be not to linger on that too long because that will probably not be the only difficult parting. Undoubtedly there are many more awaiting us in the future. It is unavoidable in life: separation is the password throughout life.

> It is sensible from time to time
> To shake off
> A tender and strong bond
> That binds and flatters the poor heart

This is what De Genestet says, but that is easier said than done, don't you think?

We continue to get lively letters from Sister, she is faring well and is enjoying life. And that makes us grateful! Her happiness is our happiness. And now I will respond to your request and tell you about Sister's wedding.[72]

* * * *

[72] The lengthy description of Kardinah's wedding follows. This has been included separately in this volume with other examples of Kartini's extended literary work. It is written in the style of a general 'ethnographic' account.

So, there you have it, a description of a Javanese wedding amongst the higher echelons of society. Sister's wedding was regarded as a quiet wedding and this already occasioned so much activity: what would a wedding be like that was celebrated more elaborately? We were dead tired after the wedding.

What do you think of all this, Hilda? A friend of ours rightly says that the Javanese people are a people of fairy tales and memories.[73]

Who will deliver this people from the kingdom of myths and legends and lead them into the real world? That surely is where things must be headed. But shaking off these superstitions does not necessarily mean they must trample their poetry under foot.

But how I go on, let me rather ask you if you are happy with this epistle and if you will now forgive my long silence. There is so much that is beautiful in my people, so much poetry in its lovely naïve beliefs. It might sound strange but it is nevertheless a fact: you Europeans have taught me to love my own land and its people. The European education, instead of estranging us from our nation,[74] has brought us closer to it. It has opened our eyes and hearts to the beauty of our land and people and also … to their needs … their wounds.[75] We love our land and people so much! Oh, if only we could do something to contribute to their happiness, how happy we would be then!

But, don't let me bore you any longer with this scribble from a crazy young Javanese girl – I have done so long enough.

I have here a beautiful book on Buddhism. It is called 'The soul of a people'.[76] It is very good

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

27 March 1902

My poor dear, my premonition did not deceive me! There had to be something not in order in your home. I thought of those frightening days in August of last year and I held my breath, I became so frightened and anxious. You are both so close to my heart, my own family could not be dearer to me! I live completely

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73 The comment was made by EC Abendanon.

74 This is the second of three occasions where Kartini employs the term 'natie'. See also her letter to Stella 11 October 1901 and her January 1903 memorandum on education.

75 Kartini's formulation neatly encapsulates how, in more general terms, the relationship between 'modernization' and cultural nationalism that characterizes later colonialism, can be perceived.

76 This is another reference to Fielding's *The Soul of a People*. Its message of spiritual freedom and universalism, of the contrast between science and 'soul', relates directly to the sentiment Kartini is expressing.

with you, with heart and with soul which has become one with yours, actually from the first day we met. How strange life can often be, remarkable, it was not so long ago that we knew nothing of each other's existence and now yours is inseparable from mine.

Great, great was the joy with which your letter was received; and although it brought us bad news about our dearest, it did rescue us from that painful uncertainty, of wondering and guessing. And already after the first line that I read in your letter, I called out 'There you are. She is ill!' Sister R. and I, who were reading your letter shoulder to shoulder, were so saddened. What a wretched business again. How are you dearest, and brother Edie? We fervently hope that while I am writing this you are walking about again, and all are healthy and well in your household and also that Edie has been released from his room arrest, while Mijnheer and your Sister will be sharing the good fortune of seeing their patients completely recovered and will also find themselves in good health.

How is it that you became so ill? Had you caught cold and were then a little careless? Get well soon dear, and do not become ill again. Nothing discourages so much as illness I think. We are never made so aware of our powerlessness as when we are confronted by illness or are ourselves ill. We imagine ourselves strong enough to move mountains, to turn the world upside down, then we are thrown onto our sickbeds, lying there weakly, and were someone to come, pick us up and throw us into the sea, we would be unable to resist, we, with our delusions of having strength enough to storm the gates of heaven. With all our heart we wish and pray that you have a speedy and complete recovery, dearest. And when you have recovered, will you please let us know with a single word by postcard? It would make us so happy and content.

How wonderfully kind you are to me. Ill as you were, you wrote to me and how uncomfortable it must have been with an ink pad on your knee. How is it that I have deserved so much love? I do not know. What I know is that I am very grateful to you for it and that your love makes my life beautiful. Despite our sadness about your wretchedness, we nevertheless had to laugh when we read that your sister spoke to the servants in Spanish. It is terrible when people cannot understand each other but the idea of your sister speaking to the Native servants in Spanish is so funny. Funny for the observer but not for your Sister.

And now: do I still have to convince you that we are totally overjoyed and grateful to you for the 12 textbooks that we received together with your letter. Thank you dearest, thank you a thousand times! We immediately thumbed through them as you can imagine. Wonderful and wonderful! Now we can

really get down to work! We have already cut the pages and covered the books, they look so attractive! Sister R. could not be torn away from botany and biology, she finds that so interesting. My little brother has the same interests, but he is happy when he can close the books and put them away! How one person can differ from the other – for him study is dull but for us it is interesting, which is understandable. Only dates we find less interesting but that could perhaps change if we learn history in a way other than how it was taught at school. The prescribed books by Wisselink (arithmetic – on the list of the teacher) we have from our young brother. Anneke is coming here on Thursday evenings and points out and explains things to us.[77]

Once again, many, many thanks dearest for the heavenly gift of your books – we are so extremely happy with them. How wonderful it would be if all that wisdom was in our heads and we could gather in more knowledge.

Many thanks for the letters from my brother. Our dear boy! The week before last we received his first letter since all this has happened.[78] I could easily imagine he found it impossible to write. In those days it really was a tremendous effort to write without making the wounds bleed. Poor, poor boy, he would so like to help his comrades; for a moment this appeared to be a possibility. There was mention of going to Europe for which only Father's approval was necessary. That is why I asked you which you thought better for us: to stay or to go if we had permission to go. My brother had been promised that the Queen would be approached on behalf of his sister, to obtain Her interest in our case. Everything was fine, my brother was in the clouds, and now he is in the depths of despair and all his great hopes are dashed! We should really be very sad about it because they concern <u>our</u> aspirations but we are more sad about him, about his grief. Poor boy, he had thought to be able to embrace us very soon. There was already someone he could have travelled with. He is such a dear, loyal boy, you would have liked him if you had met him, and we hope this will still happen. He is also a real whirlwind, like his sisters with whom he is totally involved.[79]

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77 With the prescribed textbooks sent by Abendanon and coaching from the school teacher Annie Glaser, Kartini hoped to prepare herself for the necessary examinations to gain teaching qualifications.

78 The reference could be both to Kardinah's wedding and to the failure of the most recent plan for Kartini to go to the Netherlands. (See also Kartini's letter to Stella of 14 March.) Kartini's mention that she would write directly to the Queen for support was possibly suggested by her brother. These plans did not involve the Abendanons as Kartini notes explicitly a little later.

79 Kartono's academic career at Leiden University was affected both by his own lack of diligence and lack of money and later reputedly, by the obstruction to his university studies he experienced from Snouck Hurgronje (Tjitrosomo 1967).

It was no doubt preordained that we four would mean a lot to each other. Just think of how remarkably our birthdays follow one another – Sunday, M., T. and W. and we have the same pasar name which no other member of the family has. Our common pasar name means, among other things, 'fury'.[80]

We are so glad, so glad that we had not written you about this solution that we had been offered otherwise you would have raised your hopes for us and you would now have been disappointed.[81] Later you may hear who had wanted to help us. The daughter of Minister Kuyper[82], amongst others, had been attracted to our cause and had advised us to communicate with another daughter of the Minister who is a volunteer nurse in Jogya. Fortunately we had not yet done so!

Still, let us not speak any more about a dead sparrow! Let me rather thank you for the trouble you have taken to obtain information about this and that from Dr Snouck [Hurgronje]. It is very, very sad what you write about this and I am especially pained to learn that Dr Snouck is against our struggle.

The contempt, the rejection of the large majority of the masses does not really concern us, but the support of those who belong to the 'top ten thousand' is very important to us – it is a satisfaction, a strength, a support, a refreshener, a comfort. We are then very saddened, that it is precisely Dr Snouck, the great man himself, who should be against our struggle.

'Whatever happens, never tire to keep from doing what is good.'

I was just reading this and we honestly maintain that what we are striving for is good. Does Dr Snouck know all of Java, thoroughly? Everyone knows that generally the Javanese girl is not considered when the arrangements for the marriage her guardians are organizing for her, are made. While in the Sundalands it may be the case that engaged couples know, see and meet each other, just enquire in what other areas of Java that occurs![83] And if this fact is not known, would everyone (Europeans) then ask if our sister had ever

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80 The reference is to the common syllable, 'Kart', in the names of Kartono, Kartini, and Kardinah who were the daughters of a 'commoner' wife. The younger Kartinah, like Roekmini, is the daughter of the Raden Ayu, while the youngest sister, Soematri, is also the daughter of Kartini's mother.

81 An alternative interpretation is that Kartini purposely kept this information from Rosa and her husband who had quite different expectations.

82 Rev. Abraham Kuyper, the leader of the religious reform movement of the Netherlands was leader of the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij that had gained government in the 1901 elections.

83 The criticism of Snouck Hurgronje also alludes to the fact that he lived in West Java and had married a Sundanese woman (some accounts suggest two). A reference in a letter of 1 October 1901 to 'the Sundalands' also refers to its 'modern-ness' compared to the aristocratic culture of Central Java.

seen her husband before she married? Anneke was often questioned because she is so often here at our house and so it was assumed that she must know everything about it.

It is because it is known what the customs are in this country, and besides this, how we are, that people were curious to know how it was organized. And for sister's sake we let everyone believe that they did know each other. In the meantime it gives us great pleasure to learn that the girls from Ciamis are very happy.[84] These two had in fact known their intended, but they are also exceptions – as was R.M. Ambio and his wife.[85] They, both husband and wife, are modern.

And about Mini wanting so much to study, I did not make this up; I learned this from her school friends and from a nun who taught her.

In answer to a question from a mutual acquaintance as to why she did not continue her studies – since she had so much wanted to – she replied: 'that she had to marry'.

'She was still so young, why did she have to marry?'

'Oh, it is a scandal if a Javanese girl does not marry.'

'They are very contented!'

Oh, then come and take a peek inside the houses where they are 'so contented', and first look inside the Kabupatens. There, someone has just become 'so contented'! It is a Kabupaten with many children including adult daughters, a Raden Ayu, a Regent's daughter, who, as a result of her 'happiness', had became half-insane and another woman who is also a mother. The owner of this harem recently married. I do not ask what the women think of this, what they feel, but what about the daughters who have received a European education, how had they reacted to it?

And, if they cannot express an opinion, they will at least have feelings.

'They are so contented!'

There is a daughter in another Kabupaten who, amongst children with mothers, is a child without a mother. She is alone amongst children and their mothers. She asked sister for one of her children, she so much wanted something to love and to be loved by. That request contained a world of suffering – a yearning for love. Poor child! She has had a European education and is the daughter of a well-known man. Fine, ignore the suffering, the feelings of women – they do not have the right to complain, they after all, did it of their own 'free will'! but what about the children then? What is more sad

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84 See also Kartini's letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, 30 September–1 October 1901.

85 No further information could be found regarding this person.

than the life of a sad child, than children who come to learn the shadowy side of life so early?[86]

And it is especially difficult for girls because they are present where daily nature is being violated. It is not a denial of the natural order where wives of the same man must endure each other? Truly, a child of the people herself, a woman, must let her voice be heard!

Will Dr Snouck still say, in cold blood, 'they are contented' after His Honour has seen everything that we have seen, knows everything we know?[87]

I had once transcribed an address by Professor Max Müller, the great German scholar of Eastern languages, history, etc. It goes something like this: 'Polygamy as practised by Eastern peoples is to the advantage of women and children who could not live in their country without belonging to a man, without having a protector, and that tradition is not the product of a morality such as is the case with the Salomo.'[88] Max Müller is dead so we cannot call him here to show him the benefits of this tradition.

People have attempted to convince us that not to marry is not only a scandal but also a great shame. This we have been told many times. Oh, the woman who has remained unmarried is spoken about with such contempt.

We long so much for Holland, because Holland will make us free, Europe will arm us, make us invulnerable to the narrow-minded attacks of the masses, for their sport! To become free, first marry and then divorce! But this could also become difficult: if the husband does not wish it then the wife can whistle for her freedom, while when he wishes a divorce, her opinion is not even asked and he is able to dispose of her any moment of the day! But the wife can buy her freedom and in that case she has to pay a certain amount of money. Certainly it is a dreadful business. Still, how can one expect more just laws for us if in the enlightened, civilized West, women are put on a par with children and idiots?[89]

Let me not say any more about this.

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86 In response to Snouck Hurgronje's comment, Kartini here returns to her emotive criticism of polygamy.

87 This is a notably strong criticism of the colonial government's and one of the Western world's leading experts on Islam and advocate of greater access to Western education for Indonesian (male) elites.

88 Frederich Max Müller's (1823–1900) work on comparative religions, languages and cultures, and particularly his studies on Buddhism (1888) Theosophy (1893) and Hindu Philosophy (1899) would have been well known within colonial reformist circles. Kartini indicates her awareness of his recent death.

89 Kartini's reference here to the limited freedom available to women in Europe is again revealing of her candid assessment of the reality of Western society, in contrast to the rhetoric of Western liberalism.

With sadness we learnt that your Didi will not be staying with you much longer. Poor parents. I can understand so well how much you are not looking forward to his imminent departure. Yes, what a great loss that will be when he is no longer there! It causes us pain on your behalf but we also regret it for ourselves very much. Our chance of ever meeting Edie brother in person has now vanished.[90] We were very much looking forward to it! Again another great disappointment!

Poor boy, it will also be hard for him to leave his dear kind parents and his comfortable home. We will write to him, we did promise him this. Goodbye dearest! Again many thanks for everything and everything – you will hear from me again soon.

Give our warmest greetings to Mijnheer, your Sister and to Edie, in your thoughts consider yourself warmly kissed by sister Roekmini and your devoted

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

8 April 1902

Hello dearest Mevrouw! How are you? Have you now completely recovered – we hope so with all our heart!

This letter will no doubt find you in a sad mood, either Edie has already left or his departure is imminent. Poor parents! It is such an awful moment in the lives of parents when they have to part with their children. How you will miss that dear boy! And then how will he himself feel? After having been without a parental home for so long he will find his separation from it now, even more difficult! But his work is calling him! Wonderful! To be called to labour in an area of one's own free choice. Our best wishes accompany him to his new location. Hoping that dear boy may always find happiness there.

But how we regret that for us any chance of making the acquaintance of our brother and friend in person has been ended. But we will still hear about him from time to time, shan't we Moedertje? We had been developing such an interest in him. There are not many like him unfortunately! We speak so often about him, that extraordinary boy, and here one not infrequently hears: 'Didi would never do that!' It was odd to have read of his transfer in the paper. I had only just before closed the geography book and map of Ned. Indies in which I

[90] As the following letter makes clear, after his initial posting to Batavia, from where a possible meeting in Jepara may have been arranged, EC Abendanon was appointed to the Ombilin coal mining operations in West Sumatra.

had been reading about Sumatra and the Ombilin fields. That district has now been underlined in blue pencil – that is where our dear friend lives.

You see, we have already started. Wonderful, wonderful. The Geography book of N.O.I. recommended by the teacher we received from our brother.[91] It is a very fine textbook containing many issues and references within the text that wonderfully challenge the memory.

The history of the Fatherland[92] that I was not really looking forward to because of my memory of it from school as being rather dull is better than I expected. Now we find it quite pleasant and very interesting, but it is also written much differently than it was in the little book we had in school.

Studying later in life does have its advantages: we comprehend and understand things so much better and much of what had once been dead for us has now come to life, we are interested in so many things to which we were previously indifferent or to which we had never paid any attention for the simple reason: we did not understand it. How wonderful it would be to know someone who could explain all these things for which we have now developed a lively interest. It is these silent teachers who must now provide us with answers to all our questions.

Today we are studying 'language'. The little ones watched us with amazement – they could not understand what we were doing. Oh, when will that wonderful day arrive when, before the whole world, study can embrace us as its bride.

Annie Glaser is in a sad mood because her vacation in June does not coincide with that of her sister in Surabaya that begins on 30th May while hers does not begin till 14 days later. Poor children, we have come to be quite fond of them, we have such sympathy for single women like them, both still so young and alone (their brother is also in the Indies since a few days ago). Could you put in a good word to Mijnheer for the children if it is possible to enable their vacations to coincide?[93]

Have you heard anything from our sister?[94] Her last letter to us is already a week old. She continues to write to us so sweetly and warmly about her little children. She has come to be so fond of them. Those poppets bring sunshine to her life and warm her heart. They are becoming more and more attached to

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91 It can be concluded from this that the colonial atlas, as well as accounts about Sulawesi provided by Adriani, contributed to Kartini's perception of the Native world beyond Java.

92 The 'Fatherland' here refers to the Netherlands.

93 See previous references to Anneke's sister Mientje, also a teacher. Throughout the correspondence, Kartini shows herself quite adept at making use of her colonial connections where this might be in the interests of her family and, not least, herself.

94 The reference is to Kardinah.

our sister. They have to do everything with mama 'Ibu'. In the morning and afternoon they bathe together and the oldest, who is 6 and has recently started having meals with the adults, except naturally in the evenings, must have her chair right next to 'Ibu'. They are always at her side. The eldest knows no greater pleasure than to help mama when she is cooking – she whips the eggs while the four-year old sister who also insists on helping Mama, brings her the things she needs. They are both good-looking children, light of colour with beautiful eyes. Soemiar is the name of the oldest girl, Soesmini, or just Mini, that of the youngest and the son is called Soesmoro, or Entjoes, after whom sister is now named 'Ibu Entjoes' (mother of Entjoes).

Sister is now teaching her girls this and that and they can now already write and sew quite well. They speak quite a different dialect there than here so that, especially in the beginning, she found it difficult to understand the little things. Sister has had them sleep in the room next to hers so that she can be with them immediately if necessary should something happen. She is completely involved in the joys of motherhood, this constitutes her happiness. Oh, we are so grateful for the little beams of sunshine in her life and it must also make the other one happy that sister is such a dear mother to her children.[95] Poor woman and mother! And poor Kleintje! Still, she is resolved to make her life beautiful for the sake of others and in the first place she wants to make these innocent children happy. Thank goodness that because of the affectionate nature of children, this task is made easier for her. Her father-in-law simply idolizes her, he calls her the best mother on earth!

Sister is kept fully informed by her husband of his work, he tells her everything that happens and she helps him in his work. Just imagine, she fills in forms, provides a summary of official correspondence, does translations of ordinances, etc.. And then she takes care of all the Dutch correspondence. The Regent who is the cousin and brother-in-law of her husband sends her the newspaper and if he is too busy to read it, she has to read it first and indicate what she regards as important, which the Regent then reads.

In this way our brave little one makes herself useful and at the same time benefits herself – and serves our cause. In this way, does she not gratuitously provide propaganda for the cause of the unrestricted education of the Native woman? She will raise her girls along our lines and, just imagine, her

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95 'The other one' is a reference to her husband's first wife, the *selir*. This account of her sister's life can be compared to Kartini's later account in letters about her role as 'stepmother' and wife of her western-educated and progressive-minded husband, which also avoid directly addressing polygamy.

husband has a lot of sympathy for the proposals of Mijnheer to give Native girls education.[96]

About everything else we will say not a word, what good would this do after all. We must seek out all the bright spots and if there are none then buff up the darker ones, that is the way to remain optimistic, is it not?

The only thing I do not know is how to tell Annie about her children – which must be done. What in God's name can I tell her to acquaint her with this fact? She has heard from others that he is a widower! Poor, poor sister! One of these days our girlfriend may come to visit her, a young, innocent girl with whom we have shared our dreams and joys. She is so pure and highly principled in her thoughts! Poor child, how her refined feelings will be offended there … by the facts which will make her suspect things.[97] It will be a painful process of suspecting and guessing. And our sister, oh! poor girl! God give her the strength to bear everything! Is humiliation not the heaviest burden to carry for someone who is proud by character and nature? And she cannot justify herself without reflecting on others.

I have thought a lot about what Dr S[nouck] termed 'being contented'. On many occasions after what I have seen these last days, I automatically thought of that expression and then I would smile ironically. Oh dear Mevrouw, it is and it will not be the last time that something is concealed, denied. The world is still very moralistic, it does not want to see the 'naked truth' and turns from it, the naked woman, in disgust.

You will no doubt have read in the newspapers that cholera has broken out again in Jepara and there have been many victims, especially in the jail. I shudder when I think back to last year when that illness rampaged here – at one time we were surrounded by contaminated houses – heart-rending tragedies took place. And I also was almost counted amongst its victims. Mama at the time prepared me drinks of brandy infused with herbs that rendered me unconscious. Now it can be also said that I have been dead drunk!

Just imagine what has been said about us: that we three once appeared in court dress at the ball given by Heer Sijthoff. We were wearing sorties and were still wearing them when we were in the house of the Resident which angered Father so much that he looked at us severely at which we immediately removed

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96 Later her husband worked alongside Kardinah to establish her domestic economy school in Tegal.

97 This suggests that, although a regular visitor and close friend, Kartini had not revealed to Annie the true situation in her own family, let alone that of Kardinah's. In the light of her understanding of European sentiment, Kartini was clearly 'embarrassed' by this aspect of aristocratic Javanese tradition as well as being ideologically opposed to polygamy.

our sorties and stood, terribly embarrassed about our bare arms and shoulders, in the hall. 'Witnesses' (Europeans) recounted this. Now you must know that we had never attended an occasion arranged by Heer S.! How wonderfully people can fantasize! Here a woman only appears in a court dress once in her life, when she is a bride – that is to say as a respectable woman – others who dress in this way in public are dancing girls. We laughed till we had tears in our eyes when we heard this wonderful story. Last year Heer S. commented on the fact that we three did not attend the celebration for the Queen's wedding.

Since December we have had a nephew staying here, the oldest child of our sister Soelastri; he will be 6 in May and in June will be going to school. The parents have entrusted the child to our care, we have to raise it! What do you think of that? He was an impossible rascal when he came – you could not even touch him without him yelling blue murder. Sister is a weak mother and has spoiled him so much that she has totally lost all control over him.

At first we were a little anxious, he is the first grandchild. Grandmothers are renowned as particularly weak with their children's children. The child tyrannized everyone terribly, he played lord and master over the servants who all tried to outdo each other in flattering him. Then we reprimanded ourselves – we wanted to be educators and we were anxious about just a single child. What had happened to that boy we do not know, but now we are all enjoying him. How glad and proud his mother will be with her offspring. The young person has learned so much in this short time, including learning to speak High Javanese, which he does quite nicely. Since the last couple of days he has also been learning to read and write Javanese and for some time also a little Dutch as preparation for June.[98] The little fellow takes such a delight in learning, everything he learns he teaches others, especially his mother, who he is mad about, just as people were of his mother. The idea is really rather funny that this little worm who his mother bore, is teaching her.

Just a moment ago, the little chap came in to bring Yu Tini a biscuit. (The nephews do not call us aunt but 'sis'.) Previously he never wanted to do anything for anyone else and now he is so nice and helpful. If something falls then he picks it up of his own volition. For Wiek, our youngest brother, it is also rather nice that he is there. They get along with each other very well and their friendship is good for both of them. Nephew does everything uncle does and uncle would be ashamed to do anything mischievous in front of his nephew.

Grandma, who is really an intelligent grandmother, helps a lot. Each day my brother's child, a boy of about 4, comes here to play. He could already

98 As the child of a noble family he was entitled to attend the European elementary school on condition that he could speak Dutch.

speak High Javanese when he was 2 years old and he rarely makes a mistake in using the forms. He has learnt that from his Solo mother. But oh, the child is so hopelessly temperamental, we noticed that on Sunday. If something is not done about that very soon it could make it difficult for him for the rest of his life. It is a pity, he is such a quick and beautiful child. He can tandakkan very well – that he also gets from his Solo mother.

Can one wonder that conceit forms the basic personality trait of so many Native characters when that 'virtue' is developed already on a mother's knee? What would you say about a two-year-old who screams if it is not addressed by his title? And the mother thinks it is funny, thinks her offspring is a wonder! Poor Soeti, what will become of him?

This afternoon we were so struck by a tale drawn from life's misery. A child of about 6 was selling grass. The boy was no bigger than our nephew – you could see nothing of him, it looked as though two sheaves of grass were walking across the road. Father had him come over and then we heard a story similar to hundreds, if not thousands of others. The child has no father, the mother is out working and he has 2 other brothers. He is the oldest. We asked him if he had already eaten. 'No', they only ate once a day, rice, at night, when the mother returned home; in the afternoon they ate a ½ cent worth of aren flour biscuits.

I looked from that poor little mite to my nephew who was just as tall; I thought about our 3 meals a day and I felt so odd, so strange inside myself. We gave him something to eat, but he did not eat it, he brought it home. I watched the little thing armed with carry stick and a scythe until he disappeared from sight.[99]

What thoughts and feelings did not go through my head and heart! I am very ashamed about my egotism. I was thinking and pondering my own circumstances and, out there, around me, there are so many who suffer and there is so much to be pitied. It was as though suddenly the air was aquiver with the cries of suffering people all around me. And even louder than these cries and groans there sounded, roaring in my ears: 'Work! Work! Work! Cut loose! Only then, after you have cut yourself loose through work, will you be able to help others. Work!'

I heard that so clearly – I saw it written so clearly before my eyes – that I had to write it down especially for you, because you empathize and live with us so utterly. In my best moments you are with me, so completely, so close!

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[99] This is one of only two specific references to individual people of the lower classes in the entire correspondence.

I hope that these lines will provide you with a little diversion if you are mourning the departure or the imminent departure of Didi. If he should not yet have left will you give him my heartiest regards? How are Mijnheer and your sister? I sincerely hope they were both spared influenza. We are well. I feel myself becoming better every day. Perhaps this week we will leave the town for a while, in part to make a duty visit but partly for pleasure. So now we will just go and show our faces here and there and then we will leave.

And now dearest, goodnight! Greet Mijnheer and your sister warmly from us all. For you I enclose a kiss from sister R. and from your own

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

22 April 1902

Dearest Mevrouw! How are things now with Mijnheer? Has His Excellency totally recovered? I heard from Heer van Kol who was here on Sunday, the day before yesterday, that Mijnheer was unwell, otherwise I would not have known since for the whole week we have been travelling and we did not read a single newspaper.

I read in the paper yesterday that Mijnheer had resumed his work at the Department. Thank goodness! That was a relief. We are always so concerned when we hear of ill-health where you are concerned. You had been fearful that one fine day, or should we say, one bad day, Mijnheer would get influenza. How is your sister keeping? I hope that Her Ladyship is intelligent enough not to follow the example of her family.

And you yourself, my own dearest one, how are you? Are you again totally refreshed and in good health. I very much hope so. Do not become ill again.

I presume Didi has been in the Ombilin area for some time now. Have you received any news from him yet, and what are the details? I can imagine what an emptiness his departure must have created. What is his address? Will you give it to us? We promised to send him our opinion of *Gosta Berling*.

Oh, guess from whom I received letters and photographs yesterday? From … Doppie[100] and Mary! How kindly and warmly they wrote and how enraptured they are with your present. But oh, what a fuss they make about my slight contribution. I was only too happy that I was able to do something

[100] Doppie is Abendanon's son Geldolph.

for you. The pleasure both of them expressed in the artistic workmanship of my people made me feel so good.

And what great joy they gave me in sending me their photographs. I immediately put them in my album, amongst my family and friends – that is where they belong. I have constantly to look at those young fresh faces. It is good to be able to look at such a loving young couple! What a young thing Mary is, she cannot yet be 20. The young couple can surely barely total 40 years between them! I sincerely hope that they will be very, very happy together. Ah, if Doppie's course was completed and they if they could live as husband and wife in the Indies. What life and joy that young thing will bring into the home of her parents-in-law! The first daughter-in-law and you two have not had a daughter before! Her whole appearance makes such a pleasant impression, something fresh emanates from her.

Well dear Friends, congratulations on your future daughter!

And how well Dop looks. Happiness streams from his eyes, as it does from those of his bride. I greatly enjoyed his letter, what a poetic style that boy has! And it was so nice, both wrote immediately on receiving your beautiful present. They have stolen my heart with their dear, kind words, and I will gladly continue corresponding with them as Dop suggested. Now we know two of your trio, or rather, three of the four that makes up the four-leaf cloverleaf that promises good fortune! When Dop and Mary come to the Indies they will also come to visit us. What a wonderful prospect – but that is all still in the future.

We commenced our travel on the 11th and arrived home on Saturday the 19th. At Kudus,[101] Father and Annie welcomed us with a long official telegram from the Resident informing us that Heer van Kol would be coming the following day. How pleased and grateful we were that we had not stayed away another day. And Father had also been concerned that we might have missed the train or some such thing. The Resident thought that the arrival of Heer van Kol would be news to us, Father had to arrange for a vehicle, etc. If he only knew that his visit had already been announced when Heer van Kol was still well and truly in Holland![102]

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101 Coming from Semarang to Kudus by steam tram, Kartini had to travel to Jepara by horse carriage. Her father had presumably come to collect her.

102 Protocol required communications about such official visits to be forwarded to regents via the relevant resident. Sijthoff would not have known the extent of Kartini's links with public figures in the Netherlands and Batavia that allowed her to bypass much of the bureaucratic protocol. Given that she had previously ridiculed him in letters to Rosa, here also she indicates less than respect for this high colonial official.

When you both were to come, Oom Piet also telegraphed us and at that time Jepara was still a Residency and officially he had nothing to do with Father. He also informed Father by telephone of the visit of Prof. Anton.

I will write you next time about the visit of Heer van Kol. So many times we thought that we were a step closer to our goal and each time it appeared that we were just as far away or even further.

We actually had no real desire to travel because we were so pleasantly involved with our books, and we thought it was terrible to have to give them up, but Mama wanted to go so very much and was so upset when we talked about wanting to stay home. So we went, although with reluctance but now we certainly do not regret it because, just imagine, we have seen her, we have visited our sister!

We left our home without the least idea of visiting her. We would only be going to Demak, Semarang and Kendal. That is what I wrote to her. In Kendal, however, Mama received a letter from her that father had sent after us containing an urgent and moving plea from our sister for us to continue on to Pemalang. Our sister had never complained, her letters had always been calm, reassuring, yes even lively, but that one letter destroyed all that went before! She did not write much but there was a cry of desperation in the few lines she wrote and it spoke of a heart-rending yearning for us!

The child needs us! Immediately the following day, with the first train, we rushed to her and she only got to hear the news of our arrival when we were two hours away. Long before the train steamed into the Pemalang station we were already on the lookout for our darling. And yes, there she was waiting for us, a child in each hand.

How shall I describe the happiness, the emotion that overcame me when I saw that dear face again? We did nothing else but look at each other, laugh and hold each other. An unexpressed prayer of gratitude rose from the bottom of my heart when I saw her, fresh and blooming as never before. It was wonderful to see her! Good health showed itself in her filled-out face with its rose-coloured cheeks. It was heavenly to see her eyes sparkling with happiness. She was so overjoyed by our arrival that she did nothing but laugh and laugh some more. 'Now I am young again!' she said, 'Now the old Wik will come alive again!' It was touching to see her pleasure!

How was it that she was in such good health? An old uncle of her husband who knows something about medicine had been treating her and since then she has regained her health. 'Yu, Yu,' she said constantly, 'I had so much to tell you and to ask you but now you are here, I cannot remember anything

any more. But when you have left everything will return to me and then I will mourn the lost opportunities to tell you everything.'

We looked and listened carefully. Oh, what a miracle you have created my brave little maid. We could no longer see anything of the coarseness in our brother-in-law that had given us goose bumps. He was coarse, so coarse three months ago when he celebrated his wedding here and that little vixen has smoothed off that roughness.

It makes us so eternally grateful to see and to hear how Reksoharyono honours his wife! How he has changed, and for the better, in that brief time sister has really achieved a miracle with him.

She has thought so much about what you had once written to her: 'Discover his good traits, every person has them, and develop them.' He has many, sister told us, actually more good than bad traits. He is very conscientious, he hides nothing of his past from her, which like his future, is an open book for her. He also knows that it was only for her parent's sake that she agreed to be his wife. He recognizes that what she wants is good and he appreciates that! He respects her so much and is wholly involved with her. The relationship between them is good.

But, now the other side. Oh my poor, poor, sister, in what kind of hell has she found herself! She told Mama a few things and Ma listened to her with tearful eyes. Everything could have been anticipated and what sister experiences in her daily life is only natural.[103]

My poor, poor darling! Oh, if only they who envy that young, radiant wife could see behind the screen.

Again I thought of Dr Snouck Hurgronje! Of Prof. Max Müller! Could they but read sister's heart, take a peek into her daily environment, could they then still say in cold blood what they had asserted.

Our sister only feels alive when she is out of her house, when she re-enters it, night falls in her heart once more. She stands alone there with only a trusty old servant against an entire mob who want to make her life miserable. She does everything herself assisted only by her old babu.

Everyone there is full of admiration for sister, how calm she remains despite everything. She endures everything with a smile, while that which is done to her brings tears to the eyes of strangers, servants and others. Many have shed tears on her behalf and she herself remains calm and smiling.

She has become so indifferent she told me and from time to time she is so cold that it is as if she is made of stone. Sometimes she so regrets that she

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[103] This report on her sister's life provides insight into Kartini's own later experience.

agreed to this. And when her old pride rears its head then she is so cold! There are many moments when she is totally without emotion. She fears she might one day turn into a statue, or become imbecilic.

From outside she has much support and that helps keep her sane. Her children are her only beacons of light in the house! 'I did not make an effort to have them attach themselves to me,' she told me, 'they simply came to me.' Now I can understand how these children became so attached to her, it is because their own mother cares nothing for them. It was instinct that drove them to our sister.

Everyone warned sister not to eat anything that was prepared by the other.[104] If she could be so cruel towards her children, how then might she not act towards my sister who was her archenemy! She has done something terrible with one of her children. My poor, poor darling, and she can do nothing, nothing for her!

On one occasion, when she could stand it no longer, she told aunt a few things. Aunt cried terribly and told her that she should not tell her such things again, it made her think about her own past and she could not help sister. She once gave vent to her feelings to her father-in-law, but now she will never do it again, because she would make him unhappy by doing so.

Her husband himself becomes desperate should sister only look a little concerned. Once, when her suffering was too much for her and giving in to it, she stayed in her room, he came to her, showed her a loaded revolver saying that should she moan much longer, he would end his life, he could not bear to see her unhappy. Him too she makes unhappy by her suffering.

My poor, poor darling, we thought she was born for flowers and sunshine and it appears this dream is realized, she is surrounded by flowers and sunshine everywhere but in her heart!

Dr Snouck, my sister is so contented, so contented!

We had foreseen everything!

Let me now speak of her no longer. It will only make you sad. But you do like to hear some things about her, don't you? You are just as interested in her as before, I know, and perhaps even more, because she has been given a destiny neither you nor I would have wished for that dear child. We are on friendly terms with Reksoharyono, that is her husband. I am grateful to her that he respects her so.

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[104] Poisoning a competitor was thought to be a weapon commonly employed by the displaced first wife. A suspicion has long been held that Kartini may have been similarly poisoned.

In Semarang R. and I went to visit Oom Piet briefly just before Annie, who was on leave, had visited him in his office. You know I had told him something of our plans and had asked him for his support. He had asked us to write to tell him everything we were doing, which we did but with that asked him not to speak to others about it. Annie visited him with a lady and he immediately began talking about us. While he was telling A. that we had asked him to maintain secrecy, he was at the same time telling everything in the presence of a stranger. That stranger took our side when he said we only wanted to go to Europe out of curiosity. He requested Annie to tell us that we should write to him once more and explain to him precisely what it was that we wanted him to do for us. We were however so upset by the fact that, whereas he had promised to respect our confidence, he had spoken about us in that way in front of a stranger, we did not do so.

He no doubt thought that we had come to speak to him about this matter when the two of us came to visit him on our own without Father and Mother. Neither he nor we mentioned a word about it and we are grateful to him that he was silent on the matter, we would have found it terrible if he had discussed it in the presence of his mother and sister. He said not a word and nor did we.

As we were leaving he said: 'Has Juffrouw Glaser delivered the message?' He expected a letter from us but we believe it is better not to attempt to make our position clearer to him if he does not want to understand it in any case. Everything with him comes down to 'marriage' and we are tired of hearing it. If I come across his letter again in which he mentions this matter of marriage I will send it to you. He was noticeably quiet when we visited him on this last occasion.

Just now a letter was brought to me from our sister and one from my brother-in-law. The man is always full of jokes and his letter also is full of nonsense.

Kardinah has had a photograph taken of herself with husband and children. It was not very successful otherwise she would have sent you a print. Poor girl, her husband wrote to Mama that when she had returned home from Pekalongan, to where she had accompanied us, she had been so grief-stricken, which we could well understand. In those two days we were together she was so happy! Her heart still hankers after the old things and although she arms herself with a cold indifference, the slightest thing that reaches her from home makes her heart quiver. She felt so utterly unhappy when she had once heard nothing from home for a week, she could neither eat nor sleep.

You both are sent many, many warm wishes.

Oh, could I but be with you even if it was for an hour, there is so much to tell you which I find difficult to write. So many terrible things happen in the world. Our Ass. Resident has gone to Surabaya on a month's leave for his wife's health. Poor, poor people – imagine how tragic! There is a concern for her sanity. This afternoon Annie received a letter from him saying they had to go to Buitenzorg. And she is the mother of 5 boys, of whom one will begin his studies this year. Annie will stay with us for the time being.[105] She is totally like a sister to us.

I still have many letters to write, when I have worked my way through them it will be your turn again and then I will write to you about the visit of Heer van Kol, which will certainly be of interest to you.

Now I will say goodnight, my dearest! Would you give our warmest greetings to Mijnheer and your Sister and also to brother Edie when you write him.

'Night dearest, sleep well.

Your own
Kartini

To Mevrouw van Kol

27 April 1902[106]

From the time I was a child I loved learning and it has always been my dream to learn and know as much as possible in order to make myself useful to others. How I had wanted to join our boys at the HBS, but alas, I was not permitted.[107] It was already quite something that we girls were allowed to attend a European elementary school. We are so grateful to our parents that they broke with adat and allowed us to go to school. Knowledge of the Dutch language is a bottomless well of pleasure for us. It opened up for us so much that was beautiful about the existence of which we had not the slightest idea. And it is these fine things from other cultures we would so much like to give to our own

105 This relates to the Gonggrijp family with whom Anneke had been staying.

106 This is an extract from a letter to Mevrouw van Kol that followed her husband's visit to Jepara to discuss Kartini's plans to travel to Europe. The letter extract was published with an introduction by Nellie in *Oost en West* that called for support for Kartini's aspiration for her people. The earlier letter extract identified as being addressed to Mevrouw van Kol (August 1901) may have been part of this letter and inadvertently separated during the 1911 editorial process. Nellie's introduction is appended at the end of this letter.

107 Kartini's brothers all attended the Semarang HBS.

people, not to thrust aside what is beautiful of our own, to replace it with the foreign, but to enrich it!

Our ideal is to be able to help to raise up our people, to advance them to a higher moral level and so to arrive at better, more agreeable social conditions; that would make any life struggle worthwhile! How is one able to get to that stage? One must begin at the beginning and that is, with education!

Oh, how often when our eyes behold tragic circumstances, when our ears detect cries of suffering caused by physical or moral wretchedness, a prayer arises like a cry of desperation the from the very depth of our being: 'Give the Javanese education!'[108] To educate an entire population is of course not possible but what would be possible is to educate the higher levels in such a way that they would be a blessing to their subordinates.

Nellie van Kol, 'Javanese Women', *1902*.[109]

Dear Editors

Perhaps you will not find it insignificant to learn that, following the visit of my husband to the regent of Jepara, I received a long letter from his oldest daughter, Raden Ajeng Kartini.

It is self-evident that for years I have been the recipient of letters from all kinds of women, letters that often provided me with insight into the noblest souls and the finest intellects. Well, I count the letter from this Javanese girl amongst the most beautiful and noble that I have ever received. Not because the language and style reveal a well-educated and cultivated woman, but because the confidential information allows me to see a person who has been called, who has been destined to achieve something great. These girls – because the lady Kartini speaks on behalf of her sisters – not only give evidence of the cultivated nature of the Javanese but are much, infinitely much more than that.

They are the carriers and the nurturers of one of those remarkable ideals which can change the world if the opportunity is provided. They have a plan, they have a goal, they have an aim, they have a love. In relation to their own people they still hold the position of '*noblesse oblige*' which in our more democratic society is becoming obsolete, but which nevertheless

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108 Kartini had often used this expression in her correspondence and later used it as the title for her lengthy memorandum on the need for Western education.

109 Nellie van Kol's letter in *Oost en West* entitled 'Javaansche Vrouwen' was reprinted in several colonial papers including the *De Sumatra Post* of 5 July 1902.

metaphorically, is such a fine sentiment. How embarrassingly high, for those who never think or dream beyond their own interests, do these noble girls interpret that phrase! In one moment, and without condition, they have won my support and utmost admiration. And this they would attract from any right thinking person if I were allowed to make their confidential letter public.

I intend to ask for permission to do so.

Because your public must come to know later that these passionate sisters are destined to become what Pandita Ramabai was for her Hindu sisters: the promulgator of a new dawn.

I repeat: your public must get to know them. Because, should my husband not succeed in gaining a Government financial support for these women of good will and great talent then they must be assisted by private means. So much burning zeal, so much burning enthusiasm, so much fresh idealism, they must not be allowed to decline purposeless and powerless back into the kabupten – they must be granted a broad and large field of endeavour. The views of these girls are so pure and honourable, so really apostolic, that they *must* be supported in their efforts. Should the government not assist then they must become the adopted children of Oost en West and then a fund must be established from community contributions from which their studies here can be undertaken to allow them to prepare themselves further for the task which could never be adequately prepared for unless one were called to it. And even if the government provides funding *we* must give them: love, a homely environment, good models and noble impressions.

Pending permission to publish this naïve, passionate letter in its entirety, I want to take one sentence from it which demonstrates how pure the sentiments of these girls is: 'It is not in any way our purpose to turn Javanese into European – Javanese! Our idea is, that alongside the fine characteristics they already possess, to give them what is beautiful from other cultures, not to suppress their own, or replace it, but to enable them.'

There cannot be a better, prouder and more humane perspective for an educator.

The future will, I hope, demonstrate that I have not given an exaggerated portrayal of these interesting girls and that I have not unnecessarily requested the support of the public that reads *Oost en West*.

With thanks for providing the space

Sincerely

Nellie van Kol

4 June 1902

The editorial committee adds:

Mevrouw N.v.K. has sent us the letter written by Raden Ajeng Kartini to read and we can say nothing other than that it saddens us that we have not immediately been able to get permission to publish it in our paper. The contents are of particular importance because of the way it provides, in simple terms which give evidence of a noble and upright character, such a clear picture of the Javanese aristocracy which we make use of to rule the native population.

We are in compete agreement with N.v.K. that the two energetic women, Raden Ajeng Kartini and her younger sister Roekmini must be given the opportunity to prepare themselves in Europe for the difficult and noble task that they want to take on, the education of the Javanese people through the influence exerted by the woman.

How will this happen? Only time will tell but that *Oost en West* will receive them properly and will support them in every way possible, as the passionate writer of the letter to the editors has suggested, is beyond question.

To Mijnheer van Kol

30 April 1902[110]

Sunday evening, only one week after we had the extraordinary pleasure and privilege of having you in our midst and having you introduce us to the spirit world, we attempted to call up spirits and were successful, to such an extent that we could not neglect to report to you some of the details.[111]

We had, following your advice, tied a pencil to a very light piece of bamboo. Juffrouw Glaser and I held onto this twig and almost immediately it began to move. There was someone there and it was my guardian spirit. We asked him a question, at which the stick began to move aimlessly this way and that for a while until, all of a sudden, it shot forward, past the alphabet letters and on the wall in clear letters wrote the word 'good' 3 X in answer to our question.

I asked my guardian spirit for advice and then looked away. Annie Glaser also did not watch the movements of the stick. How amazed we then were when, after a while, we looked up and saw clearly written on the wall: 'Let her

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110 This additional letter derives from *Meer Licht over Kartini* (Bouman 1954: 46–7) and reproduced in an appendix of letter extracts and extra letters in the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Allard 1976: 420–21).

111 Van Kol and his wife had been attracted to spiritualism and evidently he had discussed this with Kartini during his visit.

prepare herself through study, later when she is offered gold she will be able to benefit from it.'

The way the letter 'd' was written each time it appeared in a word[112] attracted our attention and caused us to ask where we had seen that before. We couldn't get the thought out of our head and kept thinking about it. Daylight brought clarity, bought us to remember the person who wrote the letter 'd' in the same way it was written on the wall. It was the girl with the poetic name Lali Djiwa after whom I knew that your villa in Prinsenhage where you lived for a long time, was named. It was from her that we learned something of the teachings of theosophy and Spiritualism of which she was a fervent supporter.[113]

To Stella Zeehandelaar

17 May 1902

I cannot tell you how wonderful it was finally to be able to begin my study.[114] At the moment it is mainly a question of revision of the material I once learnt and knew; it is now something like ten years since I stopped. I was surprised that I have not forgotten everything I had once learnt. But I have one advantage; I am now more receptive, understand more quickly and better than I would have done earlier. My only regret is that I am now 23 not 13. I would then be able to expand my study but now I am constrained by my age. I must first gain the two Dutch teaching qualifications and then one or two native language qualifications.

Just then I had to put down my work: just imagine my penholder broke in half! That has never happened before! Poor pen! I had become very attached to it, we had worked together so wonderfully well for so long. What a strange creature; who on earth would mourn a broken pen!

In April we went on a trip; we visited our little sister. When she departed we had not the slightest notion that we would ever see her again, but we had to go to visit another sister who was ill (our eldest). There we received the letter from our little sister with an emotional appeal to please come on to Pemalang. The next morning we immediately set off to see her.

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112 The 'message' from 'her guardian' had apparently appeared in Dutch so the letter 'd' appeared six times.

113 Bouman (1954) identifies this girl as Josephine Harsteen who had died six months previously.

114 This describes her informal preparation for the teacher qualification using books provided by Anneke Glaser and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri.

How can I describe our meeting to you? It was simply heavenly! In the first moment we did nothing but look at each other, smiling and holding each other. And how grateful I was to see her so well. I had never seen her so fresh and blooming before! Her cheeks were aglow. I was particularly thankful to see how her husband respected and appreciated her. She is his superior and he himself readily admitted it. He requests her to guide him, to raise him to her level. The influence of our little one has been marked and the good results of this are already evident. It gave me great pleasure to make the further acquaintance of a new brother. He is a good husband and a generous man with many good qualities. He is sincere, upstanding, loyal and has a sympathetic disposition. She is his comrade, his adviser, she is his friend and the mother of his three children who are as attached to her as they would be if she were their real mother.

The children follow her about everywhere like devoted puppies. The oldest child, a boy of about seven, lives with the grandparents; Sister would have gladly kept him with her and the boy, who is completely enchanted with her, would like nothing better but the grandparents are not prepared to give him up to her. The two others are girls of six and four. These she will now teach at home, her future pupils. Stella, he has handed over the education of his children completely to her and it is only natural that Sister will raise them according to our ideals. Sister was not able to realise her childhood dream as she had wished but is the task that she has now taken on any less beautiful? It is still possible for her to be a rich blessing to those who surround her.

Her influence is already evident. The Regent of Pemalang is negotiating with a lady to teach Dutch to his Raden Ayu. The Regent speaks Dutch. Why did it have to wait till Sister's arrival before consideration was given to employing a governess for his young wife? Our paths diverged but we both have the same goal. Wonderful! What does it matter what path you take as long as it is good and leads to the high ideal.

I know, Stella, that your questions about Sis and her husband are far from being motivated by curiosity, I know that it is purely and simply interest in the welfare of your sisters which concerns you, which leads you to ask these things. To you alone, dearest, only you are entitled to it and I will tell you. Yes Sister, our noble child, followed her man out of love, out of love for our dear parents and for our brothers and sisters.[115] The question of the engagement

[115] Kartini had of course previously made clear to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri Kardinah's views about the marriage. This section of the letter had been specifically edited out for the 1911 publication, as was the earlier account. As it is incomplete it cannot be determined whether Kartini revealed her sister's experience of polygamy as in her letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

was in doubt for more than a year. Father wanted the marriage very much. You will know it is the dearest dream of our parents that all their daughters are married. You will remember Father's terrible illness last year that was the consequence of a serious emotional upset when Sister categorically declared herself in opposition to the marriage. Sister, herself, was close to death, as you know, and that was also the consequence of it.

But Sister is young and she recovered, alas, not my poor old Father. He did recover but until now he is not yet back to his old self. Last year after his attack, his health remained questionable. The doctor prescribed absolute rest, strictly forbade any emotional upset, and emotional disturbance could be fatal for him.

Can you understand how terribly we suffered? My mediation was called in. I had to use my influence to get her to accept. There I was, placed between two utterly dear lives! I had to talk her into it, she, who had come to me to seek help, support, protection and whose ideas I completely shared.

I continued to support my dearest as much as I could; when they persisted in asking me I said: 'You can kill me but I cannot do this!' How I suffered, Stella, oh, it was indescribable! I thought I would go crazy with grief. That serious illness of mine was the consequence of my great sorrow. I knew what my noble dear one would do. A heart ailment is very dangerous, this must be taken seriously; I understood what you meant with your 'forgive you both' and in recommending that I read *Barthold Meryan*. We have fought the battle of both those great souls but neither Eric nor Barthold in attempting to maintain their ideals were required…

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Although it now seems a long way in the future, we know that one day it will be a reality and we will find in you a true sister. May I use your name if I am asked if I know someone in Holland where I can stay? You will put us up until we have found something in De Haag or wherever, won't you? And we will go out together, won't we, to look for suitable accommodation, and a suitable teacher? It is a lot, a great deal that we are asking you but that is what you wanted, isn't it? I long with heart and soul for Holland for so many reasons: firstly because there I could have better preparation for my task; secondly because I want to breathe in the European air to rid myself completely of the residue of prejudice which still clings to me – not much remains to still hold me back. Holland must and shall make me in reality a free woman. Your air, your cold, must dislodge all the prejudices which still cling to me. Only then shall I be free![116]

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[116] This renewed enthusiasm concerning the possibility of study in the Netherlands presumably followed upon her discussions with Henri van Kol.

To give you an example. I who would care nothing about circulating in a hall filled only with (European) men, would be completely at a loss if I had to receive one Javanese man who was unknown to me but of my same social rank and who was unmarried. It is ridiculous, ludicrous, idiotic but true: I simply do not dare to pass before male strangers without a chaperone and even if I were in company, even then I would find it unpleasant and would not be at ease!

So, you see, despite my strong sense of freedom, I have not been able to avoid my native upbringing that keeps young girls strictly apart from male strangers. If you are constantly told that it is unseemly to allow yourself as a young girl to be revealed to the gaze of strange men, and if you must stay out of the presence of men, then eventually it must make you nervous to meet such creatures. This must not continue, that prejudice must be removed. How else otherwise could we work together? This is an important goal of ours.

And only the atmosphere of Europe will be able to cleanse me completely of the influences of my native upbringing: your land, Stella, will strip those prejudices from me which now have such a detrimental effect on me. Go on, make fun of my foolishness, but your land will make me free, really free!

On 19 April we returned from our trip. Father travelled several stations to meet us and to welcome us with an official telegram from the Resident that announced the joyful news that Mr van Kol[117] would arrive in Jepara the following day. That was a marvellous homecoming welcome and there was more when I arrived home, namely a letter from you. All the civil servants along the entire route were ordered by the Resident to welcome the traveller. He devoted the entire journey from Semarang to Jepara to the study of local conditions.[118] What an incredibly hard-working and energetic spirit he is. Nothing escapes his attention. Observing, listening, taking things in and considering them is all one and the same to him.

The travellers, van Kol, a journalist who acted as interpreter and guide, and Father, who had awaited them at the border of the regency, arrived around three o'clock on Sunday afternoon. There had been an accident on the way, the carriage had broken its front axle and the journey was resumed in bone-rattling carts. Enviable man! He can get his rest anywhere whenever he needs it; he can sleep in a jolting cart as easily as in a feather bed.

Van Kol had been determined to stay nowhere else but in hotels; everywhere he had refused the hospitality offered him. Here also he announced his

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117 See above Kartini's letter of 14 March 1902.

118 The resident's orders to all civil servants to line his route presumably indicated his attempt to 'please' this famous critic of colonial administration. In his subsequently published account van Kol severely criticized Sijthoff's administration.

intention to stay at the hotel but after introductions he did accept the accommodation that we offered. Later we heard it was us who made him go against his principles. He found here so much material for his study and research; he was able to investigate what influence European education could have on girls of the aristocracy and he did not want to pass that opportunity by. It was fortunate that we only heard this later; the knowledge that we were the objects of his study would have stifled us and may have prevented us from acting naturally.

During dinner that afternoon we spoke almost continually about his wife and children. It was wonderful to hear how that man worshipped his wife. He also came to know his wife through correspondence – another point of contact, Stella! He corresponded with her in relation to her writing. She came to discover her God-given talents by accident, that wonderful writing talent of hers. At the time she was a governess and was taking a short trip with friends to a villa in the hillside of Pinanggunang (they have named their house in Prinsenhage, 'Lali Djiwa' – soul's rest – after that villa). One of the party had to write a description of the journey and fate determined that the writer was she. She sent in the description and the editor asked for more of her writing.[119]

Van Kol has been everywhere where he had lived and worked earlier.[120] The children who had earlier played with his daughter, he had met again as mothers. He still remembered all their names. He had decided to devote four days to Central Java and of these four he gave one over to us.[121]

Stella, not for a long time have we felt so happy as we felt that day and evening with Mr van Kol. And you, Stella, how you would have savoured it – but you <u>were</u> there, I had you in my thoughts all the time while I was sitting, standing, next to van Kol. Stella, Stella, Stella, it constantly sounded in my heart. It was all due to you that van Kol was sitting there in our midst, that we were exchanging and challenging each other's ideas and, most marvellous of all, that he was going to smooth the way for us![122] How I thank you, Stella.

There we were at the front section of the pendopo, our guests, our parents, Annie Glaser, Roekmini and I. Beforehand we had shown him examples of

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119 His wife had come to the Indies in 1875 as governess. She began to publish a series of articles on colonial life in a colonial newspaper in the form of letters to an intending settler which were later published as *Brieven van Minette* (1884). Henri had made contact with her to respond to her views on colonial life.

120 Henri van Kol had been an irrigation engineer in East Java 1876–1892, when he regularly published articles on socialism, advocated colonial reform and indicated support for the feminist movement. He rejected more extreme socialism and became co-founder of the Social Democratic Workers' Party.

121 Van Kol included an account of his visit in the book, *Uit Onze Koloniën* (1903).

122 Stella was a member of van Kol's Social Democratic Workers' Party.

artistic work of the people which he greatly admired and about which he made notes. Several members withdrew from the gathering, the chair next to van Kol became vacant and I settled into that place.

And then he began: 'You have plans to go to Holland? Melchers told me.'[123]

On my answering in the affirmative, he continued: 'But later it will be so difficult for you to return. The biggest problem lies in the question of the return.'

'How do you mean?'

He asked if he might be frank and express himself in a straightforward manner. When I said that I had expected nothing more from him, he said: 'It will be so difficult for you later when you marry. If you have been to Holland you will no longer be able to be content as a wife of a native ruler.'

He mentioned examples of very well educated native girls, their friends, who were married to Dutchmen. They loved each other very much but native temperament is not able to strike root in Dutch soil and the Dutch cannot adapt themselves to native life. And so a constant tension had arisen between the married couple.

What do you think of the fact that I allowed him first to unfold his story completely before I began on mine?

'Mijnheer van Kol, my intention in going to Holland is to study, to be trained for a profession, specifically that of teaching, so that, when I have returned to the Indies, I can open a boarding school for the daughters of native rulers to whose education I wish to devote myself.'

Surprised, he looked at me, a happy shine lit up in his blue eyes which were directed at me, and as though speaking to himself, he said, 'That is very fine, that is a beautiful idea, a noble goal!' And then he said to me: 'Don't you think it is wonderful to have a goal, a purpose for life?' There was such enthusiasm in his voice, it sparkled in his brilliant eyes! And I felt my heart become so excited and unconsciously my lips murmured one word, one name: Stella!

Stella, if at that moment I could have conjured you here, even if just for a moment, then the world would have been too small to contain my joy. That was happiness, that moment that my goals were so clearly apprehended, when my ideas found approval from a man of such position as van Kol. That feeling must also be the one which mothers have when they see their children understood and valued. He made it so easy for me; I did not need to do much, he understood me immediately and clearly.

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123 GW Melchers was a minister of religion, a fellow socialist parliamentarian and an acquaintance of Stella.

He asked me if I had discussed this with Mevrouw Rooseboom. No, I had not had an opportunity to do so; both times when we met her it was during a large gathering, a ball or a reception.[124] It seems that we have been discussed at the palace, at least van Kol told me that as soon as he arrived the Governor General had told him that His Excellency knew us. It is very unfortunate that I was not able to go to Buitenzorg to speak with Mevrouw Rooseboom. One can express oneself, one's thoughts and plans, so much better in conversation. I have just received an invitation from a lady to come to stay with her; she often visits Mevrouw Rooseboom.[125]

Annie Glaser will go to Batavia and Buitenzorg during the holidays, that is next month; on our behalf, she will visit the A[bendanon] family, as well as the family in Buitenzorg, to make clear to them what is on our minds.[126] Mr van Kol will write us from Batavia regarding what we have to do, write a petition or something of that nature. When he returns to Batavia in a month's time he will find a letter from us setting out our names and ages and once again in summary, what it is we want. The authorities that will have a say in this are 1. the Governor General, 2. the members of the Council of the Indies, and 3. the Director of Education who must provide his advice, and you know that that department is completely on our side and has promised to support us wholeheartedly. He only asked if we already knew someone with whom we could stay in Holland. That someone already exists, isn't that true, Stella? Also amongst the members of the Council of the Indies there is someone who is a strong supporter of the uplifting of the Javanese and has even given consideration to the education of women. As Resident he took the initiative in setting up a boarding school for the daughters of native officials so this has been an interest of his for a long time. We have a good chance, Mrs A wrote me, and Mr v K. said the same. He will discuss our matter with the member of the Council of the Indies while he is in Batavia and in Holland with government ministers. He will also speak to Mr A. He took a note of all our plans.

And in order that he will be reminded of us in Holland, we have written to his wife at his repeated urging, something which we did gladly.

He also applauded R.'s plan to go to an academy and also, should it appear that she has insufficient talent ever to progress very far in that area, to switch to a domestic economy school. He told us that in his view she would be of

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124 This had occurred during her visit in1900 to the Abendanon family.

125 This is likely to be a reference to Hilda de Booij-Boissevain, wife of the adjutant to the Governor General.

126 The 'family' in Buitenzorg is presumably a reference to Hilda. See Kartini's letter to Stella 26 May 1902.

great service to our people. He would like, however, for her sake, if she could first spend a few months at the academy, before beginning a domestic economy course. He thought it was so nice that we wanted to work together and complement each other. 'I think it is so fine for you that you two are planning to undertake this together,' he asserted several times.

I also spoke to him about the idea of having hygiene and related subjects taught at all schools and I informed him that I would very much like to undertake a course in subjects such as hygiene, first aid and nursing so that I could later provide instruction in these areas. He thought this a very fine idea: 'In the Indies this is not possible, or at least only with great difficulty; in Europe it is very easy, everything is there and you would complete it in a couple of years. After all, you speak, write and read Dutch very well.'

The conclusion was: 'You must go to Holland. With these plans of yours you have to go to Europe. Here you could not realize them. It would be very disappointing if you were not able to carry out your plans.'

I told him of the other reasons why I decided to spend some time in Europe. He shared our views on this. He also agreed that our example would have greater impact and our ideas spread more widely if we were under the patronage of the Government. The Javanese people who are very much like big children love shine and glitter. They would have respect for anything that the mighty Government is involved in. When I unfolded our ideas to Mr van Kol he asked me how I came to hold them. He followed my account with such interest. 'Will you write to my wife?' he constantly asked.

We spoke about the education (if this is what you can call it) of the daughters of the nobility. Van Kol knew some wives of Regents and knew about their monotonous lives. It was time that something was done about the education of Javanese girls. He is the last man whom we needed to convince of the importance of women to society. With what love, respect, admiration and appreciation he spoke of his noble, richly talented wife, his guide and adviser. That such a great man could belittle himself so before his wife – small of stature but, oh, so great in spirit and vision – that moved me!

I so enjoyed his company. How wonderful it would be if later fate transports me to 'Lali Djiwa' and I could experience the company of these souls and spirits. Will that happen, Stella, will it? I am so afraid, it is so beautiful, too beautiful to be true. How often, especially in recent days, did I think that the realization of my dearest wishes was at hand, but each time it turned out to be illusion! Only when something sad occurred did it become a reality. If I can actually throw my arms around your neck and feel your warm kiss on my cheek, only then will I believe that it is real and not a dream.

We have already suffered so much for our cause, Stella; we know that we will have to suffer much, much more. God grant that all that suffering and struggle will not be in vain, that it may bear fruit for our fellow human beings! We would be so grateful, if, after all that struggle, grief and tears, we can pluck at least one flower for our fellow human beings. If we are not able to go to Holland, Stella, then let us go to Mojowarno. Many dreams would thereby be murdered, but join us in being grateful that we would then have been able to maintain our honour.[127]

To go to Mojowarno would mean for us to be dead in terms of our influence in the world where, till now, we have been living but the few who would receive our undivided attention and whose survival for us would be of utmost value would be our reason for living. No longer would we be able to do anything for the women of the aristocracy whose lot in life is particularly hard (at least, that of many) and for which we are very sympathetic, unless perhaps through my writing. And yet, an influential example is better than 1000 spirited words. It would give strength to the word. For us Mojowarno would be easier; in that circumstance we would have no opposition to overcome nor prejudice.

The people would be glad to have us in their midst. The struggle we would have to undertake would be against ourselves, against the characteristics in our upbringing.

I have been advised to write down everything that I think and feel about the great injustice in our women's world that is the cause of women's misery, either in the form of a brochure or as a letter to the Queen. It would be of great benefit to our cause if a woman points out that injustice. But I must be sure of what I am doing. By raising my voice loudly against it, I will be the target for the anger and hatred of the entire Javanese male world. I am certain of it; personally I fear neither the hatred nor the anger; but if I became a teacher it is possible that, because of it, I could be standing in front of an empty class. People will not entrust the education of their children to such a person. I would thereby wound men's egotism. Beware the person who questions matters on which the limitless egotism of men is legitimated and justified![128]

I have received an answer to my question concerning the status of Muslim girls when they reach adulthood. 'A Muslim girl never achieves adulthood; if she wants to be free then she must first marry, after which she could arrange

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127 Kartini again makes clear that the plan to train as midwife with Dr Bervoets at the mission hospital in Mojowarno would be a second best outcome, since it would limit her ability to address a public.

128 The reference is to polygamy.

a divorce.'[129] We have to declare our adult independence ourselves and force the world to recognize our majority: we will do so!

You know that van Kol came here with a journalist: this person published an extensive description of the journey he had shared with van Kol including the visit to the Kabupaten of Jepara. And just imagine, he also included some details of our conversation with van Kol. Well, so now people know what direction we are taking. I can only hope that this publication of our ideas instead of causing a breach will provide further support for our cause. For the first time my name has been mentioned in public in connection with my people; there it must from now on remain! I am proud of it, Stella, to be mentioned in the same breath with my people.[130]

Safeguard the photo as a memory of the threesome. Poor cloverleaf, it would have been too beautiful, that is why it had to be separated. It is the best photo of us that we have, we all look good in it. It was taken during the Christmas festivities and it is the last photo in which we three appear as girls. The group appears to me so melancholic. It had been so beautiful, three handles bound together on one shaft and now one has been torn off. Will the wounds ever heal? I don't know. They still bleed at the slightest touch.

Oh, Stella, you don't know how we miss her. Everything reminds us of her, speaks of our darling. We now feel ourselves so old already; the past seems to lie an eternity behind us. And yet, it is not yet a half year ago that she left us.

Hilda de Booij-Boissevain

26 May 1902

Hello dearest Hilda! Can I heartily congratulate you all, also on behalf of my parents and sister, on the first anniversary of the birth of your youngest son! We wish your little child, dear little mother, with all our heart all that is lovely and good. Are both children well? And papa, has His Exc. managed to rid himself of malaria? Yes of course! Java's beautiful blue mountains will have chased it away for good.

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129 This is a further reference to the response provided by Dr Snouck Hurgronje on the situation of Islamic women. See Kartini's letter of 27 March 1902.

130 As Kartini states, the article in the leading Dutch language *De Locomotief* ensured her name and plans were now publicly 'exposed'. Before this she was known only to an inner circle of supportive and influential colonial officials and individuals. She now became the talking point of the entire (literate) colonial and elite Javanese readership and, increasingly, the target of conservative elements in colonial and aristocratic Javanese society.

Have you both recovered from your beautiful trip? We followed you everywhere! Hey, I was so happy when I read in the paper that you would go on the trip too. Hilda, did you thoroughly enjoy it? What a treasure trove of impressions you would have brought home! And oh, what extensive epistles about it would have crossed the ocean to the fatherland far away!

What impression has this marvellous land of the sun and its children made on you now that you know them better, or rather, know more about them?[131]

I have reread your last letter, in which you wrote so sensitively about the Javanese people, many times.[132] It's just wonderful the friendly way you think about the brown race, my people. Oh, if only I could get all of you here with me: I would like so much to show you the many aspects of my people. Where would one get to know a people, and gain a better understanding of them than in the heart of the people itself, and here you have a real Javanese environment. You know that you are all welcome here at any time.

I think it is extremely nice of you to want to have me with you. But alas, in the foreseeable future all I can do is appreciate your good will. To travel alone to Buitenzorg at the moment belongs to the forbidden fruit. But who knows if this won't change quite soon! So much of what one day seems absolutely impossible, a following morning is an accepted fact. The Javanese are a people of memories and legends, in dreams and fairy tales wonderful things can happen and my thoroughly Javanese heart holds on to the dream that, just as in that far, far distant past, even now wondrous things can occur. Oh, if you only knew what the dreams of your Javanese acquaintances were! Possibly they would amaze you. You might find them strange when I tell you, but I hope it would not make you shrug your shoulders in sympathy.

You know that we would very, very much like to go to your country, don't you, but not why. The most obvious reason is to see strange lands and conditions and for enjoyment and to have a good time. We have such a deep concern for our people, their woe and weal speaks so strongly to my heart. Is it then any wonder that there is a strong desire within us to do something that will contribute to the welfare and prosperity of our people? But how does this relate to us wanting to go to your country? To give the fine things from another culture, in the first place that of your country, to our people, not to overwhelm its own character, to supplant it, but to enrich the good qualities it already has – that is what we would like to do.

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131 Several paragraphs from this letter that were deleted from the 1911 publication were included as an appendix of letter extracts and extra letters in the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht,* edited by Elisabeth Allard (Nabrink & Zn, Amsterdam), 422–24.

132 Kartini employs the formal you in her letter to Hilda.

Oh, to be able to contribute to this wonderful, great task, the education, the ennobling of a people; that is an ideal that would be worth any sacrifice.

It is such a pity that we live so far away from each other. Oh, how wonderful it would be to be able to regularly exchange and argue about ideas. One can express what one is thinking and what one wants much better in conversation.[133]

I am growing increasingly fond of our correspondence, we see eye to eye on so many issues. How I would like to help you get to know my people as I know and understand them. There is so much there that is beautiful and poetic. I wish some amazing artist would arise who could describe the people amongst whom he was living, using the beautiful language of his compatriots, in the same way that Fielding did about the Burmese people.[134] Instead we have that infamous book by Veth that brought so many pens into action and elicited a storm of protest![135] What country does not have its weaknesses? The Indies has them just as much as any other country on earth. Poor Indies, overseas so little is known about you, and books such as that by Veth will certainly not increase an interest in you, rather will set you further apart.

Augusta de Wit,[136] by contrast, writes so warmly and in such beautiful style about the Indies! We always read her articles in *De Gids* with such pleasure. And, as regards its nature and the arts, this is what Borel dreams (that is his favourite expression) about so beautifully; in other aspects he is less to be admired as there he goes hand in hand with Veth.[137] Do you know Borel's piece on gamelan?[138] We think it's a jewel. Have you read that fine article by Martine Tonnet[139] about Wayang Orang at the Yogya court in *De Gids*? That is also a jewel.

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133 The summary of her reading that follows largely repeats references to authors and opinions that she had previously mentioned to others. Hilda, reporting on their first meeting, had been impressed by Kartini's wide knowledge of contemporary literature and Kartini was evidently playing up this in her letter.

134 Kartini had mentioned Fielding's book to all her other correspondents.

135 The reference is to Bas Veth, *Het Leven in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Life in the Netherlands Indies) (1900), a vitriolic critique of European settler society and the corruption of the Dutch race by association with Javanese women.

136 Augusta de Wit had been a teacher in Batavia from 1894 to 1896 during which time she published a series of English language articles in a Singapore paper, later published as *Facts and Fancies about Java* in 1898. Kartini may have read Dutch versions serialized in Indies papers or *De Gids*, as she would also have done in the case of 'Orpheus in de Dessa'.

137 Kartini had not previously criticized this popular writer noted for his writing on Chinese culture. In an article in *De Gids* of 1898 he had strongly criticized Indisch society in terms similar to Veth.

138 This reference could not be located.

139 Martine Tonnet, 'De Wajang Orang in Jogyakarta' was published in *De Gids* in 1899.

Borel should attend such a srimpi dance[140] one day; how that would inspire him to poetry! The dancing of the Yogya and Solo princesses must be divinely beautiful! People say it is the dance of all dances. It is a pity we cannot go there. We have been invited often enough but we think it is so scary to go dressed in courtly attire. Everyone in the palace must be dressed in this way (like a bride).

But I am completely wandering away from my topic. We love reading and we are very, very sorry that we don't know any languages.[141] There is no opportunity here to learn them; it is already something that we can make ourselves understood in your language. Oh, we would so love to learn those languages, to be able to enjoy those fine works in their original language. No matter how good a translation is, the original is always better. Do you know the magical book of fairy tales by Marie Marx-Koning?[142] We think it is wonderful. It seems to me that she is an admirer of Van Eeden.[143] The basis of 'Viooltje dat Weten Wilde' can be found in *De Kleine Johannes*. But don't you also think her writing is beautiful, and her stories so wonderfully thought out and presented.

I read with interest what you wrote me about your protégé, and about the poor in Holland. Yes, I hear a lot about the extreme misery of the poor there during winter. Poor, poor things! I am corresponding with a girl from Friesland.[144] She told me about conditions in Holland, and especially about the poor in Friesland. She has often sat on the cold ground with the poor during winter in the shacks where they live on the moors. Bitter winter, no work, no food, no fire, no clothes, no warm bedding – and crying children. It is bitterly hard.

We don't have such misery here, but wait, don't let me speak too soon. In our neighbourhood such misery is also being experienced. Not the cold perhaps, but stones and sand are, until now, still inedible. One sees and hears of so much misery. Where will it lead to? You have probably heard about the 500 children who lost their parents through cholera. Poor wretches, still so

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140 This is a Javanese dance commonly performed at the Javanese courts.

141 Although her Dutch is almost flawless, Kartini is aware from the reading of Dutch translations that German and English were the languages of modern thinking.

142 Marie Metz-Koning (Marx-Koning) (1864–1926), *Het Viooltje dat Weten Wilde* (1900). This was a fairytale. Her 1901 book, *Het beeld op de rots*, not mentioned by Kartini, has been described as a sequel to van Eeden's famous, *De Kleine Johannes.* Kartini was evidently quoting from reviews.

143 Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932), *De Kleine Johannes*, was first serialised in *De Gids* in 1886 and published in 3 volumes at the end of the century. Van Eeden was fascinated by the East and influenced by Indian philosophy and ideas of communalism that were reflected in this novel.

144 The reference is to Stella Zeehandelaar. Kartini is alluding to their shared concern for the disadvantaged in each other's countries.

young and already orphaned. But their situation will improve now. They are now being provided for while their parents had cared little for them.

At the moment there is terrible cholera in Pemalang, 200 people a week are dying from it. You can imagine what fearful anxieties we have had and continue to have. Sis wrote us one day that her husband caught the illness together with 3 servants of the household. She nursed them all and they recovered. But a few days later we received information that sister too had become infected. You can imagine how terrible we felt. Thank God, sister is now recovering! We visited her in April and she looked very fit and healthy again. We were so happy to see each other again, as you can imagine! In the first few moments we did nothing else but look and laugh at each other, holding each other tightly. She asked me to give you her warmest regards when I next wrote to you.

We now have a nice comrade here in the form of the local teacher. She is a dear, good-natured girl, from The Hague, who we get along with very well.[145] We will certainly miss her when she leaves but we like her too much not to begrudge her and wish her with all our heart an appointment to a better place than Jepara. In the vacation she will be going to Batavia – if only I could go with her! I would love to go out that way especially so that I could meet certain people again. Juffrouw Glaser will probably also go to Buitenzorg again and if she does she has promised us to personally bring you our regards. We have told her so many 'bad' things about you, especially about our little friend Tom.

Eh, go on, give him to her or bring him to Jepara yourself!

When I was in Semarang last month and was tramming in Bulu,[146] I read the name Boissevain on a name plate.[147] I immediately thought of you and my sister and I asked ourselves, 'Would this be a brother of Hilda?' little suspecting that there would be a letter on the way from you in which you mentioned him. I would like very much to meet your family. I certainly hope that there will be an opportunity for this. How nice that he has an English wife. Your mother is also English, isn't she?[148]

Well Hilda, my page is full and I just have room to write my name.

Give warm regards to your husband and children from all of us here. I close with a warm hand for you from your

Kartini

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145 Anneke Glaser was born in Semarang – presumably she had moved to the Netherlands where she trained as a teacher before returning to Java

146 A town to the East of Semarang

147 A relative had a business in Semarang.

148 Hilda's mother, Emily Heloise McDonnell, was Irish.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

10 June 1902

Dear Mevrouw,

How happy I was to receive a letter from you yesterday, I was so looking forward to it although never for one moment did I think I was being neglected. After all I know how incredibly busy you are. For people with a lot of time, conducting a correspondence is nothing, is even a solution to help pass the time, but I know what letter writing is for you and that is precisely why your letters are of even more value to me. I thank you very sincerely for it.

But I do not however forgive myself that I have left you so long without news. The reason for it is moreover egotistical: I was so wonderfully involved in my work, that I could only write to others, to people to whom I am more or less indifferent, and satisfy them with a couple of sentences; to write to you however is a pleasure for which I must set everything aside. And that I now must not do – you yourself would not wish it and, indeed, on the contrary, you would in fact spur me on to be as true as possible to my 'love'.

If only I could tell you with how much pleasure, which is increasing by the day, I am working with my books, your glorious gift. What I am now longing and yearning for is: to work under good guidance! That must be heaven. Anneke is conscientiously helping me where she can, and I am very grateful to her for it.

Dutch has always been my favourite subject and many people affirm that I am very much at home in it. But oh dear! – a feel for language is not at all the same as knowledge of a language! It is fortunate that I love the Dutch language so very dearly. I can now imagine what a punishment it must be for those who have no feeling for the language and who must study Dutch.

After language I find geography wonderful. I also like arithmetic very much but I am still having difficulty with history. Not that I don't like history, indeed I find it very interesting and very informative, but the form in which it is presented to us in the textbooks has very little appeal to me. In that subject I must have a tutor who would be able to make the dullest parts interesting for me. What I find enchanting in history is ancient history, it is a pity that only a little of it is touched upon. What I should particularly like to know is the history of the Egyptians, the ancient Greeks and Romans.[149]

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[149] It is notable that in these references to geography and history textbooks prescribed for European elementary schools in the colony there is no mention of the history and geography of the archipelago or specifically of Java.

But, let me now answer your letter and first of all enquire as to the health of all of you. I sincerely hope it leaves nothing to be desired. I was very happy to read in your letter that all illness has left your house. May it always remain that way!

And yes, how we would love to see the exhibition![150] We are following everything that is being reported in the newspapers with the greatest interest. How our hearts beat and our eyes shine since we only read so many good things about it! All of you have shown such zeal for your noble work and we wish you all and especially our people, in whose interests the work has been undertaken, the warmest best wishes for the brilliant success of the exhibition.

I think it is wonderful that the Jepara woodcarving received so much attention.

Goodness, how we would love to see that beautiful copperwork, we have as yet seen so little of such work and what we have has been nothing special.

To hear of the enthusiasm of the European public for the craft and art of our people made us feel so very good! We are so very proud of our people, so little known and so little appreciated!

That the box for H.M. has not yet been sent is probably because the Regents have not yet all sent the photos of themselves. I gather from the letter of the Regent of Garut that if that box is ever sent it will only be through the intervention of Mr Lawick van Pabst.[151] This is no doubt the reason why the box is in the hands of that gentleman. The R. of G. has since requested the Regents to send their portraits to Mr L.v.P. Clever man, he knows well enough that his colleagues have no greater respect than for the favourites of Fortune whom that Goddess has appointed to high places on the social ladder!

I will, with great pleasure, have the small screen made up for you: one sheet of jati wood decorated with wayang figures carved in à jour style framed in dark sono wood with an inscription on the top and with snakes on both sides. But don't tell me that you have only now given me your order, because again someone is before you and that is the G.G. who last month gave our craftsman a new order, a screen, such as His Exc. already has. Sono wood is hard and difficult to work. We have already made the model for it. It will be a beautiful one, more beautiful than any previous one. We went to a Native house for this purpose to gather ideas. I wrote to Buitenzorg that the woodcarver could not

150 Despite earlier mention that an exhibition would not go ahead, Kartini here refers to the successful exhibition by Oost en West held in June.

151 Lawick van Pabst was Colonial Adviser on agriculture but, as Kartini reveals, was playing a key role in promoting Javanese woodcraft. Kartini was arranging the manufacture of a carved box to hold the portraits of Java's regents as a gift to the Dutch Queen, which was eventually presented in 1904.

complete the work till July, I didn't give a date. This man is now up to his ears in work. If you should meet Mev. de Bruijn one of these days would you tell her that her box is in the process of being made and is nearing completion. And when that box is ready, work will begin on your screen.

We will gladly think of something for you – we think it is wonderful that you ask us! We will visit Native houses to inspect woodcarving carefully and imagine it in the context of a European house. Quite likely an idea will strike us, as it so often does and we will then sketch it and later explain it to you and perhaps amongst them there will be something that suits your taste. At the moment I can already think of something nice for you, also a small screen, but in the shape of a piece used in the wayang play. It is leaf-shaped, the carving is à jour representing a tree in which birds and butterflies are fluttering about and sitting – the trunk is resting on a wayang figure, a giant, with outstretched wings; around the trunks two snakes are entwined, their heads with wide-open jaws resting on the head of the giant. Under its wings or arms two tigers are attacking him. I will send you the drawings later when they have been completed.[152]

For this work I will try to get the wood similar to the wood of which Father has a set of chairs. This type of wood is rarely, if at all, known and makes a beautiful effect. It looks a lot like ivory and is sweet-smelling (it is not sandal-wood or rasamal wood).

This small screen rests on a base and this again on a pillar of jati wood that will be carved like the pillars of a Native house, very attractively, which we saw recently. And what is the purpose of this small screen? A mount for a series of portrait photographs. You can have it finished in Batavia or somewhere else. The rear of the open carving work can be covered in satin or plush that can be backed by pasteboard work to form a passepartout for photographs covered with satin or plush and painted or embroidered with figures, relating to those of the carvings. For instance it could have a snake of gold or silver embroidery, graciously twisting around a medallion portrait, in front of the proud head with its wide open jaws another small portrait or two snakes whose heads are joined, twisting around a portrait, then again a pair of fighting wayangs, their hands stretched out protectively around a group portrait, above the group of figures, a garuda (bird) sweeps, under its claws a portrait, which, as it were, he had just dropped. The whole will I think produce a fine effect, what do you think of it?

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[152] Kartini's account of these origins of the modern Jepara woodcarving industry, and her descriptions of 'new ideas' indicate the significance of her role in the development of this 'traditional' craft.

Goodness, I am already dying to get the work started but that can only occur after the screen for the G.G..

The box for Mrs de Bruijn will be a beauty, at least, we hope so! It has cost us some headache, a whole day was spent fitting and measuring and figuring and still more hours thinking about the frame. As long as it will now turn out all right. We are glad to do it as long as thereby the work of our Javanese becomes known and appreciated.

If Oost en West ever organize another exhibition, would you be so kind as to warn us about it well in advance?

We had the same idea as Ekawinangoen[153] – to transfer wayang figures onto cloth, although not by means of painting but by embroidery. Some time ago an essay competition was organized by an arts society in The Hague. We had intended to make for this a fan of finely carved wood and embroidered wayang figures, and a tablecloth with an episode from the wayang stories embroidered on it. The conditions of the competition were going to be announced later but we have not heard anything more about it since. It is a pity because if we now produce this idea it will be seen as us having simply copied Ekawinangoen!

We would also very much like to know what is being exhibited by the N.Z. Kunstkring.[154] Sister R. would very much like to participate in this. We want to encourage one of our other sisters who works quite well with gold and silver to do embroidery, a beautiful batik pattern in gold and silver on plush to be used as upholstery for a small piece of furniture, for instance, a ceremonial chair of white wood decorated with carving. Then also wayangs – embroidered and also in a frame – as wall decorations. Both for a possible exhibition. The sisters have a great desire to do it.

Oh, I am very sorry to hear that your John is again feeling less than well. How are the last reports you have of him? Let us hope that he may be completely well again soon! Poor parents! It is so terrible when the children are so far away, to receive unpleasant news about their health. Dop and Mary will by now have received my letter. I was so pleased with their letters and photographs; they are in my album.

We also made the comment: that lovely young face expresses a real energy and intelligence. From their writing they appear to me to be enthusiastic

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153 No further information regarding this person could be located.

154 The practice of establishing a *kunstkring*, or local arts society, common in the Netherlands, was becoming fashionable amongst European communities in cities in Java to support visiting European artists and performances but also increasingly to exhibit and promote Javanese craftwork.

people and Doppie has the soul of a poet, don't you think? Nice that your sons wrote about my brother.

We are delighted to hear that Mej[vrouw] van Loon is getting a good position. We too think it would be wonderful to be able to see her again. Would that be possible? Our acquaintance with her was rather brief, but we do feel a sympathy for her; her powerful personality does rather attract us and we would love nothing more than to get to know her better. If you meet her, will you give her our regards and tell her that if ever she should come out this way, she would do us a very, very great favour by visiting our remote corner and dropping in on us. That would be wonderful!

And now some news about Anne Glaser! She will arrive next week in Batavia and if you receive her you will see her. Can we by this letter introduce our little friend to you? If only I could come with her! You don't know how I long for you! Foremost to see my angel again and then there is so much that I would like to discuss with you.

Orally one can express things much better than in writing. Before last week therefore I considered very carefully the possibility of accompanying her and asking you for a billet. But now however strong my longing might be, whatever benefit I might anticipate for us from the trip, I must not give in to it, I must not and will not be egotistical. Now Anne must undertake our task and speak on our behalf, to tell you everything we have on our mind – as far as she is able, and she will do this gladly.

You can ask her everything you might want to know from us both, she is aware of our plans, thoughts, dreams, illusions, ideals!

Would you go back a few months in our life with me?[155] You know that Heer van Kol had visited us, but do you also know why? For us. A lady in Holl. with whom I had been corresponding for quite some while, and who was totally in sympathy with our striving and ideas, had sent him. She wanted so much to help us and that was the best thing she could do for us. She didn't know him personally but a fellow parliamentarian and party member of his, who is also a friend of the Javanese, is the best friend of her and her husband. She had told this person something about us and our plans and he had mentioned this in turn to Heer v. K. So Heer v.K. came here. He had announced his intended visit to Father from Holland.[156]

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155 Although briefly mentioned in her letter of 22 April, Kartini has delayed detailing her renewed plans to study in the Netherlands till Anneke's visit to the Abendanons.

156 It is notable that despite her closeness to Rosa, Kartini delays informing her of the nature of the meeting or letting her know of van Kol's plan to visit Jepara when she first became aware of it. The account more or less replicates that written two months earlier to Stella who was evidently responsible for arranging the visit. There is no mention of

This letter came into my possession, first through my brother and later from Father himself, with the instruction that I answer it without any indication as to how it should be answered, from which I concluded that Father was leaving me free scope. Herewith a few sentences from the letter, the beginning and the conclusion: 'From friendly parties I gathered that during my trip through the colonies you would like to meet me. And in particular to discuss the interests of your daughter, Raden Ajeng Kartini … If you would in due course inform me of the object of our discussion, then I could give it some consideration beforehand …'

I answered this letter in a way that I thought would best serve our interests. That was the letter Father signed and sent. Didn't this mean approval, concurrence, consent?

Heer v.K. came, what Father discussed with him is not known to me but R. and I spoke to him. He gave evidence of his sympathy for our struggle and our ideas and promised us his help. Immediately afterwards I informed Father of the substance of our interview. Father said nothing – but a few days later brought me a newspaper and directed my attention to an article – written by a journalist who had accompanied Heer v.K. as guide and interpreter. That article didn't exactly reproduce our conversation and our ideas but the main points were there and the announcement was made of the plan to go to Holland.

The business is therefore now public – I saw no sign of displeasure on Father's face, more possibly a glimmer of pleasure. What should I think about that?

Oh! If people should be making fun of me again, or if the Government should refuse! Well, then the way I have to go is: 'Mojowarno.' I have considered it carefully, that plan is better than any other that might eventuate if I have to give up my dearest dream. Mojowarno is no bogy for me, instead a place of peace, where a life of hard and unusual work awaits me, but where I hope and I know shall find rest for my rebellious heart and tormented soul!

But to return to the visit of Heer v.K., forgive me dearest that I have not written to you about it earlier. Perhaps I was wrong to do so, but I very much wanted to safeguard you from disappointments. You have already shared so much of our hopes and time and again you have had to share our disappointments. And who is to say that this hope will not once again end in

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the plans that had previously been discussed with the Abendanons regarding teacher training in Batavia. It can be inferred that Rosa was unaware of these renewed plans to study in the Netherlands, and that Anneke Glaser was acting, as it were, as Kartini's emissary to gain her support.

disappointment. I don't know what Heer v.K. will do for us. In Holl. he will speak to the minister about us. In Batavia he will go to Mijnheer. We told him that are you both fully informed about our plans and that we have the support of both of you in our struggle.

He asked if I had spoken about it with Mev. Rooseboom. No, we had not had an opportunity to do so. The G.G. had told him that His Exc. knew us three.

But whatever happens we can continue to depend on the support of Mijnheer, can't we? If a petition has to be sent or a letter has to be written to the Queen, then can we send it to you both first?[157]

We were so calm and at peace when we spoke to Heer v.K., it was as if we were with an old trusted friend and completely forgot that he was a total stranger. He was also so straightforward, so friendly, so fatherly towards us, that was the reason why we could completely entrust our hearts to him. He made it so easy for us and accommodated us in such a cordial fashion! We didn't have to say very much, he immediately understood us, and so well. For the first time after being silent for so long, the little bird in our heart sang once more – jubilant songs. They were treasured moments that we spent with him.

How am I to describe to you the joy of the soul when we find another fully in accord with that which we find beautiful, especially when that thing of beauty is a child of our own deep reflection and feelings! I again had to think of certain days in the autumn of 1900. How my little bird then also sang beautiful, wonderful songs of jubilation, of riches, of good fortune and gratitude! There can be such terribly beautiful moments in one's life. And the memory of such a moment is a treasure for life, it is a light in darker days, a comfort for the soul when it is imprisoned by melancholy.

It was so very kind of Heer v. K. to come here, to make that tiring trip to our out-of-the-way corner for the sake of what to him were totally unknown people. He did not immediately sail the same course with us, oh no!

'You have plans to go to Holland?' he enquired. And upon my affirmative answer he continued: 'That is all very well and good but later it will be so difficult for you to return. In that return lies the greatest difficulty.'

'How do you mean?'

He asked if he could be frank, to come straight to the point. I had not expected anything else from him and when I told him that he said: 'It is so

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[157] Earlier references to Abendanon's support for a petition related specifically to the plan to undertake teacher training in Batavia.

difficult for you when you marry later. When you have been in Holland, then you can never be content again if you were to become the wife of a Native ruler.'

Sadly I thought to myself: 'One doesn't even have to go that far, to make some of us unsuited for a life lived by all our ancestors and thus far by our contemporaries.'

I was silent – he provided examples of women, friends of him and his wife, refined, educated Indies women married to pure-blood Dutchmen. They were very fond of each other but the Indies person cannot feel at home in Holl. as the Dutch person cannot feel settled in the Indies. In this way a constant tension develops between the married couple who nevertheless love each other very much.

Then I spoke: 'Mijnheer van Kol, my purpose in going to Holl. is to study, to be trained for a vocation, specifically that of teaching, in order later, when I have returned to my country, to open a school for the daughters of Native rulers to whose education I wish to commit myself totally.'

He looked at me in surprise, with such a pleased gleam in those blue eyes that were directed at me, and he said as though speaking to himself: 'That is wonderful, that is a beautiful ideal! A noble goal!' and then, turning to me: 'Don't you think it wonderful, to have a goal, an aim in life?' There was such spirit in his voice, it echoed in his sparkling eyes and my heart warmed.

How he listened with interest when I informed him of our plans and ideas, told him of our ardent longing to make our life beautiful for others, to mean something for the community, to participate in working towards the elevation of our people. I set out for him our thoughts about this, that it of course would not be possible to educate an entire population at once, but that for the time being, the upper levels could be educated and in such a way that they would be a benefit to those below them, and that to begin with, the mothers had to be educated.

He must certainly be the last man to whom we had to demonstrate the worth of the woman to society. How he respects and honours his wife! With what love, regard, honour and appreciation he speaks about her, his leader, his adviser! We savoured it and it moved us!

He asked where we had obtained our ideas from, how they had formed within us, and time and again he asked me to write to his wife so that she would be able to speak to him about us as soon as he had returned to Holl. and, if I should wish to go in that direction, she could be of assistance to me, give me much good advice, she, who had for so many years made a special study of

child education. I wrote to her, I did so with pleasure. It is delightful to come into contact with a woman like Nellie, the Children's Queen![158]

We then told him everything: R., that she would very much like to be trained in the arts and, if it should appear after several months at the academy that she did not possess sufficient talent to ever achieve very much, she would transfer to the domestic economy school to train as a teacher in domestic economy in order later – in the Indies – to teach the Javanese women the value of money. Isn't it part of the aim of the Government to teach its Native officials thrift? A beautiful idea! – but what is the use of the Government even forcing the Native officials to set aside money if their wives, in whose hands the control of the household resides, have not the least understanding of the value of money?

Little sister would undoubtedly be of great benefit to her countrymen if she were able to teach the Javanese housewife thriftiness, to use money wisely! She is very interested in this, much more than in being a teacher, which she was going to choose earlier if nothing else was available to her.

We have a great deal of information about the domestic economy school. And what your K. wants to do, you know! She wants to be prepared for the task she so very much wants to take on: to stand guard over the innocent souls of children, to lead them and to form them! To gain the two qualifications and later also the language qualification, my mother tongue. We intend to open a school together, if possible a residential school, because we want to have our pupils totally under our guidance, to watch over them, to lead the young hearts and to form the young characters.

We definitely do not want to make of them half Europeans or European Javanese, with this free education we aim above all to make of the Javanese, real Javanese, Javanese inspired by a love and a passion for their land and people, with an eye and heart for their beautiful qualities and – needs! We want to give them the finer things of the European civilization, not to force out or replace the finer things of their own, but to enrich it. Through the cross-fertilization of plants and animals of different types, one produces an improved grade of plant or animal species. Wouldn't the same result be achieved in the case of the mores of peoples? When the good qualities of the one are mixed with those of the other, wouldn't a more elevated morality sprout forth?

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158 Nellie van Kol had become well known for her children's publication, *Ons Blaadje* (Our Little Newspaper) which she edited and contributed to between 1901 and 1903 and her 1899 article in *De Gids*, advocating the importance of children's literature, 'Wat Zullen de Kinderen Lezen?' (What Will the Children Read).

Now the response: why did it absolutely have to be Holland? – a question last asked by you. R., because for one of the two chosen subjects she can only be prepared in Holl.

And I, what are my reasons? – I can complete my study here just as well as in Holland, certainly, but if I received my education in Holl. wouldn't I be more equal to my task as teacher and educator? My horizons broadened, my intellect enriched and all that would undoubtedly contribute to the carrying out of my task.

Europe will teach and offer me so much that my own land could not offer and teach me.

Apart from the ordinary subjects of elementary education and handicrafts, I would also very much like to teach another subject at our school (!!!), knowledge of the body, its internal and external construction plus the functions of each of the organs of the human body in maintaining life and health. Many accidents would not have happened, or would have been reduced to a minimum, were such information generally known!

Just to give one example a young girl was recently run over by a tram. She was brought to the kota to be given medical attention and arrived as a corpse; she had simply bled to death because neither the police, nor those who transported her had any understanding of the construction of arteries, or bandaging. Such knowledge plus hygiene education, pathology and first aid must be part of our education. Once in their lives, everyone and especially a woman, will have to attend a sickbed of a dear one, or of a stranger; in such a situation it is terrible not being able to do anything which is unavoidable if one has no knowledge in this area. I have felt very miserable when I witnessed a loved one of mine lying mortally ill. This knowledge I want to gain in order to teach it at my school – that I can easily learn in Holl. – where everything is available.

And another reason why we believe a temporary stay in Europe would be desirable is to purge us of the childish influences of our Native upbringing, from which we have not escaped, unfortunately! What, for instance, do you think of the fact that *we* with our strong sense of freedom, our advanced concepts, have no idea how to receive a strange young man of our social level? I think it is silly, ridiculous, idiotic – but a sad fact, nevertheless – that we do not dare present ourselves to strange men without a chaperone, and even if we are accompanied, we still do not feel comfortable. If from a very early age we are told that it is indecent for young women to appear in the company of strange men, that they should keep out of the way, then eventually they must find it abhorrent to meet such creatures.

To meet totally unknown Europeans, even a battalion of them, sister R. claims, is nothing, but for one strange Javanese we creep timidly into our corner. It is like that with many things.

We want to free ourselves completely from the stifling bonds of our deeply-rooted habits, whose influence we cannot escape, to thrust from us all prejudice that has stayed with us and restricts us so that our spirit, frank and free, can spread its wings more widely – so that more good can and will come from the work that we want to undertake.

To do this we must be in a completely different environment, in another country, with completely other morals, customs, habits and conditions. We expect that Europe will better prepare us, equip us, for the work that we want to commence; that it will steel us, protect us with an armour coating against many a poisonous arrow, which no doubt many fellow countrymen will aim at us, because we dare to be different.

Europe will teach us truly to <u>be free</u>!

Have I adequately explained to you the 'Why'? I hope that you have understood me. And can you go along with me? There are still other reasons why we want to go to Europe but the above is for you I trust, sufficient.[159]

I had to ask Heer v.K. his opinion about the suggestion of Mejuffrouw van der Meij to be a co-worker of *Belang en Recht*.[160] The idea that a child of the people should teach foreigners about those people he thought a good idea but the fact that I would have to write an article every 14 days, he liked less. 'Write only when you feel like it, then you will write well and three good articles are better than 10 that have little to say, aren't they?'

That is true enough; it is not that likely that every 14 days one would feel the need to write. But the aim of Mej.v.d.M. is not that every 2 weeks I write a powerful plea (that I might not even be able to do) for something or another but that I simply tell about my people as 'I know them' and from my point of view, their life and suffering, their soul. I would very much like to do this. Heer v.K. made the kind suggestion that when I wrote something, to send the article to him and he would ensure that it would be printed in a widely read periodical.

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159 It is clear from this lengthy justification for wanting to go to the Netherlands and Kartini's question at the end, that, despite having discussed her plans for further education since August 1900 with the Abendanons, Kartini had either not made clear to them, or they had yet to come to terms with, her main aim of studying in the Netherlands. Kartini's long and voluminous correspondence with Stella therefore forms a separate trajectory in her life.

160 Mevrouw van der Meij was editor of *Belang en Recht*.

It is certainly made easy for me! Help and support enough … if … if our parents will only let go of us! Heer v.K. kindly suggested that should I come to Holl. that I should spend the first month with them in Prinsenhage, to rest and to get to know the strange and the new! Will you let me, dearest?[161] And now the question, if our request was approved, whether we already knew someone with whom we could stay in Holl.

Initially we can stay with a lady in Amsterdam, a friend and confidante of mine, whom I have come to know and love through correspondence as a loving, refined and extremely well-educated women, with a kind heart, practical and with good common sense.[162] She expresses great interest in our striving and declares she is ready at any time to gladly undertake the most difficult of tasks for us. I am totally convinced that this is meant sincerely. I have experienced many tokens of her friendship and affection. She has offered, if necessary, by personally visiting them, to try to make members of the Second Chamber sympathetic to our cause. With her assistance we shall endeavour (if indeed she has not already done so in advance) to find something secure in The Hague providing board and tuition – where we want to be so we can be close to my brother. Old and trusted friends of my Father who reside in the Hague itself have continuously shown a great deal of interest in us. We can stay with them and without doubt Messieurs De Vogel and Overveldt[163] will be willing to help and advise us in finding a family with whom we could board and in the matter of tuition.

And whoever may let us down, Kartono, who just as furiously as us longs for our arrival in Holland, certainly would never do so.

We have one other dear friend living there, the lady from whom we learnt painting – a sister-in-law of our friends, the Ovinks.[164] We are very fond of her and she of us. She would definitely be only too happy to help us with this and that. She is such a warm, friendly person. She would like it very much if we came to Holland. Mrs Ovink will introduce us as her daughters to her sisters in The Hague and in Leiden.

I must not conceal from you that Mother Mies would rather we stay in the Indies, than to see us go to that faraway, strange land.[165]

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161 This request is more than polite hyperbole. While both reform-minded, political ideology separated the liberal progressivism of the Abendanons from the left-wing socialism of van Kol. Later Stella agreed that it would have been impossible for Kartini, on a scholarship granted by a Christian Democratic government, to be associated with the leader of a socialist party.

162 The reference is to Stella Zeehandelaar.

163 Both were Socialist Democratic Workers' Party members of parliament.

164 This is a reference to Elsie Ovink, also a minor Dutch writer.

165 This was also the view held by the Abendanons, and indeed all her close associates including Nellie van Kol, Stella and Adriani.

And, as regards supervision, we will report to the Committee for the supervision of the sons of Native rulers studying in the Netherlands, located in The Hague that is headed by Heer van der Wijck. Mijnheer has no doubt had a hand in this, has he not?[166] The request came from the Indies! As soon as it has been decided whether we are permitted to go, our first task will be to contact that Committee. They would not exclude us because we are daughters and not sons would they?

We are so totally alone here! There is no one to advise us, to lead us! Oh! Please continue providing us with your moral support! Dearest, will you be my guide and adviser? It is a great favour that I ask of you but where else would I turn but to where my heart draws me, that makes it beat with a warm love, and where I know a loyal heart lies, beating warmly for us.

Show me the right way, I will follow it, yes, I will, I want what is right. Tell me frankly your opinion on all this, of everything I have told you in this letter, do not be afraid to hurt me!

Oh dearest! If only I could but briefly see and speak to you!

Good night, my good angel! Accept, together with your husband and your sister, the kindest regards from us all.

For you I enclose a kiss from sister R. and your own,
Kartini.

To Hilda de Booij-Boissevain

17 June 1902

Dearest Hilda!

How can I thank you for the delicious surprise for us that so recently arrived from you in the form of the loveliest portrait of your little ones.[167] Thank you Hilda, thank you. Let me shake you by the hand, the pleasure you have given me is so great! I just can't take my eyes from that painting! How fortunate you are, Hilda, that you can call those two angels yours! All of us here want to gobble them up. Goodness me how Tommy has grown! A fine boy! He looks out at you so sweetly and so intelligently and it is so lovely how

166 Van der Wijk was the former governor general. The idea of the committee was promoted by the Oost en West society in response to the increasing number of Indonesian (male) students in the Netherlands. Kartini assumes that as Director of Native Education, Abendanon had been instrumental in establishing this committee. There had however never been a female student – Kartini would have been the first.

167 A section of this letter first appeared in an appendix of letter extracts and additional letters in the 1976 edition of *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Allard 1976: 424–25).

he embraces his little brother. It is altogether delicious. Tom looks so much like you and the little one like his papa, I think. He is such a dear. And so happy! You would like to just take him in your arms and give him a kiss on his soft round cheeks, his fat little arms and his pudgy little hands.

Eh, I so long for them. Wonderful children! One can use the expression 'clouds of children' about them. I know it would be a wonderful moment in my life if I could hold those angels in my arms in reality. If this copy already drives me to ecstasy, what effect will the original have? So you see, Hilda, I have completely lost my heart to your little ones! How I wish that I had left with Mej. Glaser – then I would already be able to see you tomorrow. That would have been divine.

But how are you all Hilda, you, your husband and children, are they all well?

I just read in the paper that several Chinese girls had submitted a request to participate in the examination for lady teachers. Hooray! To progress! I was so excited by this! The Chinese are very strict as regards the maintenance of old traditions but you see; even the strictest and oldest tradition can still be broken! That instils courage and gives me hope!

How I long to make the acquaintance of those brave Chinese girls! I would so like to learn more about their thoughts! I am sure there would be a lot of poetry! Have you ever attended a Chinese wedding? I have once and will surely never forget it. The Chinese also remember their ancestors with both joy and sadness.

In Semarang a Chinese millionaire has created a beautiful Chinese garden.[168] It is located on a hillside and is, oh, so beautiful! Artificial rocks, grottos, hillocks, covered in ferns, flowers and miniature fruit trees are intermixed with stretches of parkland and winding paths. In the middle is a beautiful dome located in a pool full of gurami and goldfish. Alongside it is a hill which contains a grotto within which is a bathroom. By means of a staircase that runs through the grotto one can reach the top of the hill where two miniature temples stand, surrounded by fruit trees and all kinds of flowers. It has really become a fairyland, now only the gnomes and the silvery elves need to pop out from the cracks in the rocks and holes in the ground to complete the fabulous scene. The idea is totally poetic and its realization pure art! But how can there be art without poetry? Everything that is good and noble and holy and beautiful in this life is – in a word – poetry!

We met the Chinese who built this. They were just ordinary, shabby baba![169] All the plaster statues of dragon creatures, tigers dotted around the

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168 This replicates her account of the garden of Chinese entrepreneur Oei Ham in her letter to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri of 3 January 1902.

169 This provides some insight into how Chinese in general were regarded by cultured Javanese.

grass are also the creations of these Chinese. It is a pity that two statues of European origin have been erected at the entrance: that destroys the sense of harmony.

Did you also go to Batavia to see the Exhibition?[170] Of course! And, what is your opinion now of the brown race? What is your opinion of their creative work?

Oh it is so easy to be proud of my people. They are certainly capable of great things! But you Hollanders must guide it! And that is what you want to do, isn't it? We can be compared to children, and you are our guardians. It is up to you to guide us, to shape us into men and women! I believe you will not have thankless pupils and students!

To Mr Henri van Kol[171]

21 June 1902

Raden Ajeng Kartini, daughter of Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosroningrat, Regent of Jepara, aged 23, born in Mayong, District of Jepara on 21 April 1879, wishes to be trained as a teacher (assistant and head teacher certificate) and to undertake this course in the Netherlands.

The latter condition is in the first place to enable her to extend her perspective, to broaden her intellectual horizons, and to rid her of the prejudices that remain and restrict her, and to visit different educational and training institutions there to become familiar with the latest approaches to education in the Netherlands. This she wishes to undertake in order to be able to better fulfil the task she wishes to take on.

Secondly, she wishes to undertake courses in health, patient care and first aid as well as initial accident assistance in order to teach this highly useful and essential knowledge to Javanese women.

The main purpose is: to be able to pass on to our people the best of Dutch culture in order to enrich their customs; as a means to raise them to a higher level of morality; as a means to bring about better, more felicitous social conditions.[172]

The means by which we aim to achieve this is: to establish a school for Javanese girls, initially, by way of experiment and model – a school, a boarding institution, for the daughters of native officials.

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170 See earlier references to the proposed exhibition of Javanese craft in Batavia.

171 This is a semi-official document Kartini was asked to send to van Kol in connection with his efforts to gain approval for a government scholarship, the first for a female Indonesian student.

172 This replicates Kartini's earlier formulation of this general aim in her letter to van Kol.

The aim for this is: to give Java cultured and educated mothers who will pass their culture and education to their children, their daughters, who in turn will themselves become mothers and their sons who will one day be called upon to safeguard the weal and woe of the Javanese people. In this way mothers will be a significant factor in the vigorous spreading of Dutch civilization amongst the Javanese people.

My request is, whether the Government is willing to lend me its support to realize the aims expressed above: to in the first instance take on the cost of the entire education: (travel there and back, study, living costs) and later, at the completion of my studies, to make it possible for me to establish a boarding school for the daughters of Native officials.

We would be pleased to learn what we need to do further in relation to this request. Does one need to submit a formal request? It would be wonderful if this was not necessary, but if it should be required, who must do this, Father or me, directed to the Governor General or the Dutch parliament?

We appoint you with full confidence to represent our interests. We know, we feel, that in you our interests have a great supporter and a strong advocate, that you will do everything in your power to ensure the successful fulfilment of our aim, and that you will show us a way, the best one, for us to follow, because this is also your aim, your dream: to ensure a better future for the Javanese people.

We have received permission from our parents to devote our lives to the realization of our ideas concerning the Javanese people. It was not easy for them to do this. It was hard for them to hand over their children, their dearest possessions on this earth, to a life which, although dedicated to the Good, will be one of great hardship since that is inevitably the fate of pioneers, in whatever field and in all times.

But when they saw how serious and just our desire was, how our happiness was linked to our ideal, then they could no longer refuse, and uttered that word which gave special significance to our lives and our striving.

It is through our beloved Parents that we have been dedicated to the welfare of our people – their blessing rests upon our work! It would have been terribly difficult for us, it would have broken us, if we had to do it without that: we have such an incredibly deep love for our parents! But we could never have been at peace with ourselves if, surrendering to our filial love, we had smothered the powerful voice within us which calls upon us to labour and battle, to work for Society, for the fundamental purpose of Life, that is Perfection!

For this reason we are eternally grateful to our parents for giving us their permission.

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

12 July 1902

Father and Moeder have both given us their full approval![173]

We had expected storms, lightning and thunder. Oh, I can't really believe it yet! That father would agree we could expect but that Mama would accept it we had not dared to dream! Now that it has come to this declaration Mama and I have not become estranged from each other. Oh God, who could have imagined that just through this we should become closer! Deeply grieving mama returned home, one could see immediately that something was wrong. She had spent the entire night weeping because of us. Finally it has come to a declaration. Where I got the sense of calmness from when Mama spoke to us, where that calm, sober confidence came from, I don't know. I had not rehearsed what I was going to say, I couldn't think, there was too much swirling in my head. But when it came to speaking, the right words came from my lips by themselves. Who did that, who put the right words in my mouth? Who? Who?

There is a power, higher, greater than all earthly powers together. Good spirits must surely have encircled us and placed those words in our mouth as we gave voice to our conscience, our ideas, our ideal! I can still hear Mama say sorrowfully: 'Oh child, why did you not trust me?' We confessed our mistake and told mama everything. Poor, dear Moeder! We are not worthy to kiss the feet of her dear faithful soul.

If I could only tell you what Mama was to us all those long years, what she is still to us. Only now do we understand fully what a debt we owe to her, a world of love and gratitude! We are so grateful that we will be at peace with Mama as we go into the service of the Good that she also appreciates and recognizes. We are now not as exuberant in our happiness as before, yes, until quite recently. We are now quietly, deeply grateful!

And now father. I had prepared myself for the worst when I went to him to ask his permission. Oh, where did I get that calmness from, that assurance with which I spoke, I don't know! My calm confident, sober voice sounded strange in my own ears: me, usually like gunpowder, but now so calm and soberly! I was unemotional but when that word for which I had come was uttered and I saw how much it had cost my dear Father, the ice around my

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[173] The approval to which Kartini refers concerns their permission to apply for a scholarship to study in the Netherlands. This letter, more intimate than the similar account of this crucial moment in her life sent to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, suggests the long and close association Kartini had with Marie Ovink who also therefore had a closer understanding of Kartini's familiy.

heart melted away. Oh, how I would have loved to have flung my arms around him, whispered him words of comfort but my muscles and my voice refused to obey me. I sat on the floor before him and looked up at him, for a long time with a mist before my eyes! I felt his suffering deeply, I suffered with him. Oh, I would like to give everything back to him!

A prayer rose up in my heart: 'Father, forgive me! Oh, my father, forgive your child, she can do no other!'

It happened on 21 June. I specifically chose that day, your birthday, to take this difficult path to Father because you I wanted you, my Moedertje, to be with me in these difficult moments. Good spirits surrounded me, my heavenly father stood beside me in the battle with my earthly one. When I was alone again afterwards and had what I had gone for, there was no sense of jubilation in my heart, it was full of sympathy, empathy with my dearest loved ones. My tears were dedicated to them, not because of happiness or gratitude. From the depths of my soul the prayer arose: 'Oh, may the great sacrifice made by my parents make flowers bloom and fruit grow for our land and its people!'

On that very day, 21 June, we wrote to Heer van Kol in Batavia, at his request. This letter contained details of our names, age, ideas and hopes. What we had needed was merely the paternal approval; without that we could do nothing. Now that obstacle has been removed, the rock which had blocked our road has been rolled away. Now we face a second obstacle: financial. Our parents could not possibly pay for our education and we definitely would not ask that of them.

The day before yesterday we received a long and serious letter from Mevrouw van Kol. If it weren't for the fact that I still needed it, or if it would not ask too much of my fingers to transcribe it, then I would gladly send it to you to discuss it with you. Now I will just limit myself to mention to you several points; our overall impression that made us so grateful. She has given us more than just moral support: she has also given us something of herself, something intimate that lives within her heart and her soul!

A Light has penetrated deep within us, a high and holy Light.[174] It is as if we have been ordained! We have no anxiety, feel no fear any longer; we are at peace, we have faith, we believe! Oh, how small we still are, how low to the ground! Oh, if only we can get to the stage where we live no longer for ourselves but for the spirit within us. We are filled not with jubilation and happiness, but with a quiet grateful happiness! Oh God, we are so grateful, so

[174] Since 1901 Nellie van Kol had edited a Salvation Army periodical and in 1908 joined that denomination. She was evidently writing to Kartini about the importance of religious belief.

grateful for what we have found: we have finally arrived here via much doubt, disbelief and concern about worldly conventions.

I cannot describe to you our mental condition, you can only feel it. What I can tell you is that we are so grateful that which has made our lives more beautiful and has given our striving greater significance.

We have been seriously thinking things over and over recently and now see things in a totally new light. It had been fermenting and growing within us but we hadn't realized it. And Mevrouw van Kol drew the curtain from our eyes. Oh! We are so utterly grateful to her for this, more than for anything else she has done and will do for us in the future.

Before I received her letter Ma had asked me: 'Who put these ideas into your heads?' And immediately I had answered: 'God gave them to us.'

Of course Ma had tried to keep us from our intention but when she saw that we were not to be shaken from our determination, she said in resignation: 'All right then children, I shall think and believe that this is your destiny: that God has destined you for that life.'

Mevrouw van Kol wrote: 'There are things for which we need people and their support, but there are many more things for which we can only call on God. It is He who, having called someone to undertake something, provides the inner strength and perseverance. Believe me, this is the voice of experience. You are still standing at the threshold of your life and your work. Once you are in the middle of it you will experience that

> we are only free and strong and truly the friend of mankind and its helper when we do not depend exclusively on other people but on ourselves and in Father – God. But the material existence is also necessary, you need the assistance of others regardless. It is not everyday that such fresh and pure labourers as you present themselves in the great market of life to undertake such good work. They must be employed and exploited in the best sense of the word. If the Government won't help, then the Oost en West Association must.[175]

Unasked, Oost en West offered us their help and cooperation. Mevrouw van Kol sent us their paper – where this was reported. It included an account of Heer Stoll's[176] journey and in the conclusion, where we were mentioned, the *Oost en West* wrote: 'And we trust that Heer van Kol, who has been a member

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175 This is an extract from Nellie van Kol's article published in Oost en West's periodical. It was the first public announcement of Kartini's aspirations.

176 Mr Stoll, a journalist, accompanied Henri van Kol and reported on the meeting between Kartini and van Kol in *De Locomotief*.

of Oost en West since its foundation, will not have forgotten to tell her that she can count completely on the help and support of our association in her noble efforts.' In relation to that article, Mevrouw van Kol has sent in a brief account of what she thought of us in reference to our letter and in this way prepared the way for us to the hearts of the Javanese-loving public who are the readers of the *Oost en West* newsletter.[177]

She had asked me permission to publish our letter in its entirety in that publication. I don't like it but it is in our best interests. She wrote: 'the circle of friends will have no better way of getting to know you and to appreciate what you are striving for than by reading a simple letter in which a young Javanese unrestrainedly pours out her heart to an older woman from whom she is expecting support and empathy. There is not a single word in that letter that the public shouldn't be allowed to read, and really, I know of no better means to introduce you to this circle – who have the best interests of Java and the Javanese at heart. Conquer your scruples, which I can understand, and say yes!'

I haven't decided on this yet; I would first have to ask Father's permission. Father had just asked me to – as far as possible – keep the matter secret: 'When the Government says yes then the whole world may know.' It is very true that we must choose our way very carefully but the experience of recent days has taught us that we can win more through publicity than through secretiveness. If the public knows, as it now does, and the Government refuses, then we would not lose anything. How many petitions haven't been refused?

But that's not the reason why I hesitate. Nor because I think it's terrible that my most intimate thoughts will be open to the whole world to see. My own feelings are totally irrelevant, I am purely focused on the matter at hand! I mentioned one issue in my letter that will certainly not be acceptable to our compatriots, namely the issue of marriage.[178] People may well revile me for it. Personally that does not concern me, but it may well affect the project. Would people later, when I become a teacher, want to entrust their children to me if they know what we are engaged in battle against? Or is it better to go into battle with an open visor – after all we want to serve Truth – and fly our colour immediately? It has always been my aim to write about this subject but I wanted to wait awhile until I have established my independence.

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177 Apart from encouraging Kartini's attempts to gain further education, Oost en West increasingly engaged Kartini to liaise with the Jepara woodcarvers to provide items for its members and for sale. The Abendanons were also members of this association while Kartini's brother, Kartono, assisted the association in the Netherands.

178 This involved the issue of polygamy.

Our ideas will no doubt be warmly welcomed in European circles and some, about education and development, also in the Javanese world. But how the ideas that I have written on the accompanying pages[179] would be received by the public for which we are prepared to make so much sacrifice – I don't know!

What do you think? Will you give me advice on this? I will also discuss it with mama.

Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

15 July 1902

My dearest Mevrouw, I would have written much earlier had it not been for a discomfort in my right arm which prevented me from writing. Now that my hand has completely recovered I do not want to wait another day to give you some news of us. Anne came home before last Sunday and together with her we received your letter by mail. Thank you so much for it!

We are so glad that you liked our little friend and we thank you so much for the kind reception that she received from you. Anne came home in raptures, head over heels about you-know-who. We had expected it, now she understands why we are always so taken with a certain person.

How heavenly, yes how <u>divine</u>, it would have been had you accompanied her. Oh! dearest, dearest, we long for you so much. Will it ever happen again that we will meet in the flesh, eye to eye, heart to heart; that we will find ourselves standing opposite each other again? I think I would not be able to say a word; I would just hold your hand, look at you, just look at you with tears in my eyes and a smile on my face! No, I won't speak about it any more, this happiness is not for us, not yet for us!

Anneke has delivered us the messages from both of you. Concerning the small table ordered for your sister-in-law; dearest, you know, don't you, that I am always more than ready to be of assistance to you but I fear, I fear, that in this case I will have to disappoint you. You wanted the table in August and it is now already half July. The piece of furniture itself, if you sent me the measurements <u>now</u>, could possibly be ready but the silverwork that you wished to have on it, I fear would not be. That could not be made until the table was finished, otherwise the goldsmith could <u>not</u> obtain its <u>correct</u> measurement. I hope that you will <u>not misunderstand</u> me, that you will know that it definitely is not unwillingness but lack of time that is the cause of my not being able to

[179] These 'pages' are not extant but Kartini's pronouncements on polygamy were regularly introduced in her letters to several correspondents.

be of service to you in this. If you are willing to take the risk then I will gladly have the work undertaken but I cannot guarantee that it would be ready in August.

We read a report in the paper about the holiday camp. It gave us such great pleasure to know that your noble work was crowned with such a good result. That is a wonderful reward for all your efforts, noble friend of humanity! How it must have filled your hearts with joy and gratitude when you saw all those delighted children's faces!

On behalf of my brother, Boesono, I thank Mijnheer very much for his advice. My brother would like nothing better than to go immediately to Batavia but this is now absolutely impossible, unfortunately! A week or so ago a resolution arrived from Buitenzorg or Batavia: 'no jaksa may be promoted to wedono who has not first been an assistant-wedono'.[180] The nomination of the Resident, recommending my brother for that promotion, was returned along with it. But not so long ago the son of an unknown Regent – a jaksa who has never been an assistant-wedono – was promoted in this way. It was said that it was intended that he succeed his father as Regent in the Oosthoek.

In short, Boesono must now be reduced to Ass. Wed. in order to be considered for promotion as Wedono. Anne no doubt told Mijnheer some of the details of this matter and you will therefore understand how terrible all this is for my poor brother. As a plaster on the wound, the R. gave him free choice of which Ass. Wed. position he wanted! His appointment, or rather his demotion, will no doubt be confirmed soon.

Now he does not dare go to Batavia in case this creates possible unpleasantness; it will of course be assumed if he goes now, that he is going to complain, and that could cost him dearly.

Should he gain promotion in the near future then he will immediately request leave to go to Batavia. It would then be seen as his pleasure trip which he was treating himself to because of his promotion. He would love nothing better than to leave the Residency, this entire district, behind. Even before Annie's arrival, we had had lengthy discussions about this. Poor boy, what a lot he has had to put up with from his cheeky little sister. Why did you not escape from there? Find and make your own way in the world? You – a man – and one who is so infinitely better prepared for the struggle of life than so many of your countrymen.

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180 In the parallel Javanese colonial administration a *jaksa* was a Javanese law officer, and a *wedono* was a Javanese lower administrative official.

Here in the Residency he certainly will not advance very easily, because – because … no, I do not dare write it down.[181] I advised him to flee and he himself is thinking about it seriously. If a jaksa's position becomes vacant in Batavia he wants to apply for it. He now politely asks Mijnheer if his Excellency is not able to use him in the Department as clerk or a similar position. He would very much like to work in Batavia, if possible in Mijnheer's Department, if not, then in some other Department – as long as it is in Batavia. He would take the lowliest of positions as long as he could support himself on it. Could Mijnheer help him in this? The boy wants to get on and entirely agrees with Mijnheer that to do so he must come to Batavia. Now that the circumstances are such that it is not advisable that he go there for 'pleasure', he wants to come there to work, if, after being demoted, he does not gain his desired promotion. He is a real glutton for work, he certainly is. It is self-evident that I have told you this in the strictest confidence. If the slightest hint of this should reach any of his superiors, things might be very difficult for him! What does Mijnheer now advise him to do? Poor, poor boy![182]

But is it not funny that our boys come to us with their problems! They are only girls, bah! Now they see it differently. I knew that about Boesono a long time ago but now it has come out into the open: he openly sides with us and has expressed to us his undivided sympathy for our struggle.

Sister R. has already informed you of our glad tidings has she not, that our Parents have given us their complete approval?[183] The unbelievable, the unexpected has happened: Mama does not only not object to our plans and ideas but even dreams along with us!

The declaration has not caused a rupture between Mama and us – indeed we feel even closer to Mama now that it has all come out into the open, between that dear wonderful Moeder and us. We are not worthy to kiss the soles of the

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181 Kartini later suggests the Resident objected to the family's links with the socialist parliamentarian, van Kol, and the known views of his sister and brother Kartono. The letter provides clear insight into the pettiness and intrigue within both the Javanese and European departments of the colonial bureaucracy that were also to impact upon Kartini's aspirations and eventual marriage. Boesono was eventually promoted to regent in 1905 on the death of his father, but of Ngawi, not of Jepara. As a consquence Kartini's mothers and sisters were required to vacate the Jepara *kabupaten*.

182 This entire episode is another case where Kartini attempted to make use of their 'good connections'. The case also reveals the uncertainty created by the changing climate within the colonial bureaucracy. Reform ideas emerging in Batavia had not yet penetrated to the regions where 'old colonialism' continued.

183 The following section of the letter is substantially the same as that written to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer and Stella Zeehandelaar.

feet of that dear, fine person. If only I could explain to you how and what she has been for us all these long years and what she still is for us.

From where I obtained the calmness and composure with which I defended our conscience, our ideas, our feelings to Mama, I do not know. My own voice sounded strange in my ears, was it I, who was speaking so calmly and with such composure, I – gunpowder! I had not prepared beforehand what I was going to say, I could not think, I had too much to worry about. But when the decisive moment arrived the appropriate words came to my lips by themselves. Good spirits had hovered about me and had placed those words in my mouth. Our heavenly Father stood beside us in the struggle against our earthly Parents!

Poor Moeder had suffered much before she had spoken to us. One could readily see that she had been suffering. I can still hear her say in great sorrow: 'Oh, child, why did you not trust me?' We confessed our guilt. Only then did we fully realize what our Moeder is to us, what a debt we owe her, a world of love and gratitude!

'I shall think and believe, children, that that is your destiny, that God has ordained that life for you.' How we thank her for those words. Oh! We are so grateful that we will go from her in peace and that her blessings will accompany us wherever we go in service of the Good, now recognized and acknowledged by her!

And now Father! I had prepared myself for everything when I went to Father to ask his permission. I had expected that there would be a storm, lightning and thunder – I was calm – unmoved, but oh! when that word was uttered, for which I had come, and I saw how much it cost my poor dear one, the ice in my heart melted, I wanted to return to him everything that we had gained. I felt his grief so deeply and suffered with him. I so much wanted to fling my arms around him, speak words of love and comfort to him, but my muscles and my voice refused to support me. Silent as though paralyzed I sat before him on the ground and regarded him, unceasingly, a mist before my eyes. 'Oh! Father, my Father,' my soul cried out, 'forgive me, forgive your child, she could do no other!'…

So we obtained what we had so furiously wished for, but no, there was no jubilation in our hearts, only deep, intimate sympathy, compassion for our poor, dear loved ones. Our tears were offered to him and in our heart a passionate prayer arose: Oh! May the great sacrifice of our parents bear flowers and fruit for our people!

No, we definitely do not delude ourselves, but one dream we do maintain, and allow us to keep it, dearest, and that single one is: that through much, much

suffering and pain we may achieve something, no matter how insignificant that may be to the benefit of our people and especially our women. And if this is not granted us, then may our suffering and striving at least have as outcome: that the attention of many may be directed to conditions that so desperately need improvement.

And should even this be denied us, well then we have at least striven for the Good and we are utterly convinced that all our tears now apparently shed, unnecessarily, will help form the seed from which healing flowers will one day bloom for the next generation!

The message from you both, brought to us by Annie, has placed us in turmoil once again.[184] It is quite, quite true what you both suggest – and we thank you for it very sincerely – that even if everything should now go well, if we were to go to Holl., we should bear in mind what our return would be like. Who would we still find in Batavia? Certainly, most certainly not anyone who is now working for our cause. Everything will have changed. And what then?

We would undoubtedly choose Batavia without hesitation, if only to be so close to you – which we would find fantastic – were it not for my little sister who would then have to give up everything which she had so very much desired. If we stayed here, she would have to study to be a teacher and that is something she would not look forward to. And we have seen how sad it is to undertake a task, such as that of teaching, without any love for it. R. herself says nevertheless, 'Wherever you are I want to be – and if the only thing I can be is a teacher, well then, I shall try, to the best of my ability, to fulfil my task!'

But I, I would find it terrible for her, a pity for her and for the cause if she had to give up her plans. For the cause it would be a loss; a course in domestic science and handicraft will undoubtedly be a great attraction for the Jav. women. It is the ideal of almost all Jav. mothers, that one day their daughters would become outstanding cooks and sewers. How few there will be who would have any insight into the task which I so much want to undertake, who would have any feeling for a spiritual and moral education.[185]

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184 This is the clearest indication that Kartini was aware of the Abendanons' opposition to Kartini and Roekmini going to the Netherlands, or at least the plan arranged with Henri van Kol involving official parliamentary intervention. See also the earlier letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri where Kartini belatedly informs her of this plan. Kartini here once more presents her arguments in support of the idea.

185 This argument is again taken up in her memorandum, 'Give the Javanese education'. After successfully running the small schoolroom in Jepara, Roekmini returned to teaching following the death of her husband and later qualified and taught as a Fröbel teacher in a government school.

There must be something tangible, something that one can see, touch, and appreciate with the naked eye, to make our project appealing and desirable to our fellow countrymen. We must really take account of the wishes and attitudes of our people for whom we want to do all this. The task of providing object lessons our little sister would undertake, and that is what she very much wants to do.

We would also very much like domestic science to be taught here because it includes subjects which we regard of great advantage for the Jav. society, such as, for example, administration, health, first aid and so on. It is such a terrible shame that we cannot discuss this with you in person. Much will no doubt have to be removed from the list that is certain, that cannot be helped. We are certainly not so conceited as to think that our ideas are the best. We would therefore be delighted to have the insights of older, skilled and experienced people and to begin searching and selecting with their guidance to pick out the best. Oh, if we could only be with you, now that we have our Parents' wholehearted permission to commit our lives totally to this work to which we feel ourselves called. With this permission a large boulder has been removed from our path and now we are confronted by a second: the financial problem and the rest!!

But let me now tell you what has made us so thankful besides what I have already told you. In the last few days I received a long, very serious and extremely sympathetic letter from Mev. van Kol in which she expressed her support for our efforts and besides that stressed their importance. No, she did not portray to us a rosy future, neither in regard to the path we had chosen nor regarding our stay in Holl. 'Yet you will not be spared the difficulties and the sharp thorns,' she says. 'But no child of God succeeds without suffering and pain. We need it to become strong and – so that we learn to place our trust entirely in Him and in ourselves…'

Listen: 'to achieve one's goals one must set aside many illusions. And make many sacrifices! You, and especially you, must keep your eyes unwaveringly fixed on the important and the significant representatives of our generation, on the leaders and the fighters, who, sometimes not understood, yes – even reviled, by the people for whom they live and suffer, who have gone to God and said: "Show Thou thy ways to me; help me across the abysses and the thorny paths, it is Your work that I do, give me the strength!"'

All that sounds very serious. But life is serious; and it is sometimes tragic for those who only live for an ideal!

And about going to H. she says: 'You will often feel disappointed and will hurt yourself like a wild bird in a small cage. Believe me, it will be like this

(we do believe it). But then I will be there, with whom you can safely entrust everything, and who shall try to comfort you, and look at things in the way experience has led me to see them, and to help you to judge people as they need to be judged: without either idolizing or reviling them.'

Mev. v.K. gave us more than moral support, she gave us something of herself, something very intimate that lives in her heart and soul.

We searched so far, so far afield and it was so close by, it had always been by us. It is in us! It is as if we received an ordination, as though we had became stronger. We have no apprehension, no fear any more; we feel completely at peace and safe now that we know and feel that there is Someone who is constantly around us and by our side, who watches over us, and that Someone will be our support, our comfort and refuge for the rest our lives; we can feel it.

It had been working in us for a long time and we did not know it. Mev. v.K. pushed aside the curtain before our eyes for which we are extremely, extremely grateful, even more thankful than for everything else that she has and will do for us. How small, so very small and insignificant we are; we are still so low to the ground.

God grant us that we might reach the stage 'that it is not for us, but for the spirit within us which directs our lives'.

'The material existence is also necessary,' says Mev v.K. 'You must be helped, somehow.' If the Government does not help then the Oost en West must. She sent us the edition of *O. en W.* in which the Society, unasked, has promised us their help and support. Had you read that? If not then here is the piece: 'We trust that Heer v.K., who from its inception has been a member of the Oost en West, will not forget to tell her that in her noble work, she can also count completely on the support and cooperation of our organization.'

In relation to that item, Mev. v.K. sent in some lines in which she described what she thought about us after reading a letter of mine: 'in this way to open up a pathway to the heart of the Javanese-loving public which reads *O. en W.*' And now she asks me permission to have my entire letter published in that journal. 'There is no better way,' she says, by which that friendly public could get to know you or come to appreciate your struggle so well, than through reading a straightforward letter, not intended for publication, in which a youthful Javanese, without reservation, opens her heart to an old woman, from whom she expects support and sympathy. There is not a single word in the letter that the public should not be allowed to read. And really, I do not know a better means by which to introduce you to this circle which is well-intentioned to Java and the Javanese. Overcome your scruples, which I well understand, and say yes.'

You can well imagine that I would find it unpleasant to have my deepest thoughts laid bare to the public. But that is not the reason why I hesitate to say 'yes'. I am completely disregarding my personal feelings and am only thinking of the cause, exclusively of the cause.

I touched on one point in that letter that will not be pleasing to the Javanese public, namely: the question of marriage. That I would be personally attacked about it is not the issue; the question is: would it not damage the cause? Later, when I am a teacher, would I be entrusted with children if it was known now what other issues we are involved in fighting against? It is my firm resolve to write about this question one day because only through publication will this situation that so desperately needs changing be improved; but I had thought to wait with this until I had fought for my independence. Or would it be better to fight now in the open, to confess to the public now our real character? We now do this partially, but not yet completely.

Certainly we have to be very careful, but the experiences of recent times have taught us that secretiveness leads to nothing, only lands us from the frying pan into the fire I should say, and that publication would take us much further. I can also understand why Father wishes to retain secrecy for the time being because it will be so difficult for him if the Government refuses and the public makes merry about us.

Therefore, on his behalf, I have, respectfully, a request to Mijnheer: whether he could arrange that, if Father put in a request in the next day or so, this not be made public or printed in the paper. When this difficulty – the financial one – has been cleared up, then the whole world may know what we want and what our intention is.

We are striving so hard to raise ourselves above pettiness and narrow-mindedness. The first small storm of indignation and ridicule has already sailed over us. R. has already told you about this, has she not? Uncle and Aunt think it is terrible and were very saddened that their beloved niece was attacked in this way – it was at a dinner at their house!!![186] They so wanted to spare me, and all the nice things that their guests said of me, their niece, Aunt reported to Mama in the presence of all the ladies of Uncle's court. That was supposed to be how I was spared! We are very grateful to Aunt because as a result of this we found Mama. Aunt told Ma to forbid me to write for the publication – the R.A. of Garut in her time also published, but she had a husband, and I poor fool, do not, and so that was not 'pantes'?!!!

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186 This ironic comment concerns the regent of Demak and his wife.

Anyway, we explained everything clearly to Mama and now Mama laughs about it herself. First Mama wanted to bring the matter before the family council and to wait for its decision. We firmly argued against this – we are her children, and not those of the family, we only need their agreement and not that of anyone else. We acknowledge nobody's right to be involved in this situation other than those of whose love and sympathy we are convinced of. And we did not need to look for signs as to whether the family was well disposed to us. They simply cannot forgive us that we are not more paltry than most of them show themselves to be.

Mev. O. wrote to us: 'If you could only win over Uncle's heart – Uncle is ambitious and is in touch with the Government, then I would contemplate your future with more peace of mind.'

To win Uncle's heart? Easier to reach the sun – than his heart. We can be assured that we will experience much opposition from him and if he were able, he would like nothing better than to finish us off. Why? Because we are struggling towards the Light![187]

When Mama told my Moeder of what happened in Demak, she said nothing and later told me: 'I knew which way the wind was blowing; take no notice. Your uncle and aunt will grind you to powder, but do not fear, there is a God, so long as you want and strive for what is good, He will watch over you.'

Aunt mentioned that 'one' said of me that I had requested the Government to force all daughters of Regents to be teachers. Truly amusing! One of my nieces told Mama that she wanted to write to me about it. We found this idea so amusing, that that little madam wanted to discuss this with me, that we laughed till we had tears in our eyes.

Last year everything was in order, but after Father spoke with him then things went wrong.

Nellie van Kol asked for support for her public children's library, something that also interests us.[188] It will be good for our reputation. And the more well-known we become, the better it will be for the cause. Funny that we also have to make a name for ourselves!

'In the kingdom of the blind
The one-eyed is king!'

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187 This reiterates a constant theme in the correspondence regarding the role of the influential Regent of Demak, Kartini's uncle, in opposing Kartini's modern ideas.

188 Although Kartini mentions to Stella that she was working on these, it appears she was unable to complete them and publication did not eventuate. Kartini's contributions would have been relevant for both of these projects.

She sent us a bundle of writings of hers. What she had intended for children, adults will also be able to read I think. It is so informative. How simply and very sympathetically she writes. She discusses very serious subjects with her young readers, like women's position, religious belief and so on.

Oh! we are so grateful that we have made contact with her. In due course I will send you her letter, then you can enjoy it in its entirety, I wish we could talk with you about it! I will then also send you a copy of the letter that, in our interests, she wants to publish in *Oost en West*. May I? Will you read it and then without reservation tell me what you think of it? We would very much like to hear your opinion, before we decide.

I received a jubilant letter from Stella Hartshalt[189] in which she declared herself to take responsibility for everything relating to her little brown sisters, to look after everything in consultation with Heer van Kol, if we should come to H.

We would very much regret it if you did not meet him, you who so much admire idealists. It truly refreshes one to meet someone like him and it is such a comfort to know that in this world of materialism, pettiness and narrow-mindedness, such superior people as Heer v. K. exist. But wait a minute: I still have to write to him about the letter from his wife, he will enjoy the fact that I have received it because he was so insistent that I write to her – I am glad I did it straightaway. I shall tell him that we would like it very much if he met you, someone who is such a good friend of ours. What a pity I did not tell him when he was here. Eh, I would really like to meet him again.

Anne has told you about Spiritualism of which he is an earnest adherent,[190] has she not? I am so happy that he has told us about it, not so much with regard to calling up spirits but more because of the wonderful aspects of the belief. It reconciles us with so much that superficially appears to be unjust – and the belief offers such comfort, that the obstacles of recent days are punishments for sins committed in a former life. Amazing things have happened. Kartinah is a strong medium. One evening she undertook the calling up of the spirits. Now you must know that she is neither able to write nor read Arabic, and the pencil that she was holding wrote a whole sentence in Arabic script. It was a message from Mama's Father to Ma and a moment later she wrote in Jav. It was from Father's Father: it was a warning not to be upset if something should happen.

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189 Stella had married Hartshalt in 1900 and, although Kartini had earlier referred to Stella as a married woman, this is the first reference to her married name. Presumably her marriage was discussed in letters withheld by Stella from publication.

190 Spiritualism was a fashionable belief at the turn of the century referred to in a number of books Kartini had cited.

At that time we knew of nothing and lo! a day later the sad news came relating to Boesono. Coincidence!

Another thing: my oldest sister has been ill for a long time and did not really know what was wrong with her. She had been several times to the doctor, was given some medicine but still felt terrible. Then we asked the spirits what was actually wrong with her … and a little lodger announced itself. Sister declared this was definitely not the case and the doctor also said that she was not expecting. A few days after the séance Ma received a letter from my brother-in-law: they had been to the doctor again and he informed her of what the doctor had said and the remarkable thing was that it was almost word for word the same as what K.'s pencil had written several days before that letter. How can this be explained?

Even before Annie's postcard we knew that she had visited you that night and had dined with you, also through K[artinah].

We are completely dumbfounded by it. Heer v. K. told us that he and his wife had often received good advice from the spirit world through spiritualism.[191]

Yes, indeed, Life is full of mysteries. It had been predicted for us that Father and Mother would give us their permission without fuss – God be praised, it was so!

Goodbye now, my dearest Friend! Give my regards to Mijnheer and your sister from us all, including Anne. For you a warm kiss from sister R and,

your own
Kartini

Would you be so kind at your convenience to send me the address of Theo van Dissel?[192] It is for his school friend Boesono.

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

18 July 1902

Moeder! We can't find the words to properly describe our feelings. Everything seems unclear, children's babble, our heart feels so rich, so powerful!

Oh God, I thank you, is what my heart, my mouth, my pen are saying until I feel I am in the blue heaven where He, to whom my gratitude is directed, lives.

Continue to love us very dearly, it is so necessary for us – our path is so difficult.

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191 About this time Nellie van Kol was moving away from spiritualism and advised her husband against the practice.

192 This would seem to be a reference to Theodoor van Dissel (1873–1959) born in west Java and approximately the same age as Kartini's older brother.

To Mevrouw van Kol

21 July 1902

There are sometimes wonderfully beautiful moments in life that make us feel as though we are no longer of this earth, as if we were only living in our minds, wholly absorbed in its jubilation, ecstasy – especially when it has found what it needed, for which it had hungered: The Higher Being! It was just such a moment for us when full of emotion we read your letter which exuded such a refreshing, strengthening and, in particular, purifying breath of a great soul and of intellectual beauty to us!

How should I describe those feelings that so move our heart as we read those words, which we call a heavenly blessing! Ah, everything seems like the underdeveloped, unclear, confused, chatter of children, our heart feels so rich, so strong.

It has given us more, much more than moral support; you have given us something of yourself, something very beautiful, something intimate that lives in your heart and soul.

We have been searching for so long and so far and we did not realize that that it was so near, continually by our side: It is inside us.

Allah or God, for us it is no empty invocation any more.[193] That word – oh how often used thoughtlessly! – from now on has a holy, sacred sound. Thank you, oh thank you that you have moved aside that curtain that was before our eyes, for allowing us to find that which we have so long been searching for!

If I could only tell you how quiet, how peaceful it now feels within us; how still and entirely content we are: no anxiety, no fear any longer. We feel safe, at peace! There is Someone who guards over us. There is Someone who is constantly with us and Someone who comforts us, who is our support, our safe haven for the rest of our lives. That is what we feel.

Yes truly. God allows no one's task to be too heavy. He gives each of us the strength to do the work to which He has called them. What we have both found is a gift from God, a judgement from Heaven. The Almighty sent you, two tried and experienced fighters for His holy purpose, His holy command named Love, to stand by us, young inexperienced fighters, to support our unsteady steps, to lead us along our difficult path.

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193 The tone and content of this and long letter to Nellie van Kol suggests both the significance of influence and Kartini's desire to establish a strong bond with Nellie in preparation of her stay in the Netherlands

Thank you, Oh Gustiku, for this blessing! That is why the beautiful words of De Genestet in 'Terugblik' had such a wonderful effect on us! Our souls were hungering, searching … we didn't know for what!

It is as if we have received an ordination, life now seems more beautiful, our striving more wonderful, and we ourselves feel better, stronger. We have not been able to forget you since we heard your voice speaking to us. Your words continually echo in my mind like a requiem: 'who no longer live for themselves but according to the spirit within them.'

Had I only the words, if only for a minute, to be able to picture my feelings for you in a pure and precise way! Alas, I don't have that power, I shall pass over it in silence. I thought about that word when we reread your request regarding publishing my letter and asked ourselves: 'How will this affect our cause?' The friendly suggestion by *Oost en West* allows us to expect a positive reception from the Java-friendly European public but how will that letter be received in our own world? Possibly the suggestions about education and development will be welcomed by our compatriots but that goodwill will not be extended by the indignation that will be aroused by my comments about the marriage issue, in particular amongst men.

I don't retract one word, on the contrary I have much more to say on that subject and it has always been my intention to loudly voice my views on it because only publicity can lead to bring about the desired improvements in the situation which so desperately needs to be improved. I thought I should wait with this until I had a firmer footing on the path I have selected, after I have successfully fought for my freedom and independence. But now I think it is better this way, to immediately begin the battle with open visor, from the very beginning to inform Native society in detail what we are made of.

But if you play at bowls you must look for rubbers, isn't that so? And it is for that reason we ask you to postpone for a while in publishing my letter. Not because I would want to retract one word of what I have said about the cruelty of patriarchy under which women and also children suffer but because I want first to prepare myself in other aspects on which I will be attacked and which could damage the cause.

In that letter I said that Native parents were increasingly wanting a freer upbringing for their daughters, and I indicated the Government and private schools as evidence for this. We know this for a fact from our own knowledge as well as from acquaintances and others but we have no firm evidence, figures, and that is what we would like to be able to provide.

Then I mentioned a European school for girls of the Preanger aristocracy (Manonjaya).[194] This happy news I read about in *De Echo* but I can't find that edition, although I do have another one that refers to a European school for the children of the Native aristocracy that receives a subsidy from the Government. I want to get information about that.

Don't you think it would be better that way? You have the permission you requested to publish the letter but would you please wait with carrying this out until you receive further news from me?[195]

That people will severely attack me personally about what I have said about that institution, which makes things so easy for the man but so cruel and hard for the woman, is nothing to me. [196] I am prepared for that, and I don't expect anything else. We are considering only the issue at hand, that is the only thing we have our eye on, and whatever could damage this we must try to avoid, shouldn't we?

In the meantime the first small burst of indignation and ridicule, especially ridicule, has already passed over us following an article by Heer Stoll in *De Locomotief*. But it left us cold: we try our hardest to rise above everything that is mean, small-minded and petty.

People's ridicule does not affect us – but what does cause us sorrow, and very much so, was that we had to cause our dear parents so much suffering by staying true to our idea! But we could do and can do nothing else. It is understandable that it is very difficult for them to hand us, their children who for them are the dearest things on earth, over to a life which, while dedicated to a fine goal, will be full of difficulty because after all this is the fate of all pioneers, in whatever area and in all times. Thank God, thank God that they have now finally freely given us their permission to commit our lives to the achievement of our ideal.

How thankful we are for this I cannot tell you! That permission has caused them and us such a struggle: a whole history of wrestling, hoping and despairing, battles, difficulties, suffering and sorrow lies behind us! We are ever so grateful that we will go in peace from our dear ones; that their blessings will accompany us everywhere, wherever we go in the service of that which is Good. It would be incredibly difficult for us to go on our way without their blessing; it would cast a shadow on the rest of our lives: we love our parents so deeply and yet we must follow this path. We would never be at peace with

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194 No further information could be located concerning this school.

195 This is a good example of how Kartini was using her writing to pursue her ends without offending any of her supporters.

196 The reference is to polygamy.

ourselves if we, giving in to childish love, smothered the voice within us which calls us to labour and to battle, to work for the Eternity!

I can still hear Moeder saying: 'Well children, I'll believe that this is your destiny, that it is God who has ordered your life.' There was so much resignation and melancholy in her voice. Those words will stay with us as support and comfort along our way.

And Father! I had prepared myself for the worst when I went to him to ask his permission. We thought it would storm and expected lightning and thunder. I was so calm and controlled, my own voice sounded strange to my ears. Was that me who spoke so calmly and so assuredly? I, Miss Gunpowder? I was unemotional but when that word for which I had come was spoken, and I saw how much it had cost my beloved, the crust of ice around my heart melted away. I wanted to surrender everything that we had achieved back to him. I wanted so much to clasp my arms around him, to voice words of love and comfort but my muscles and my voice refused to do service – as if paralyzed I sat there before him on the ground. I continued to look directly at him, with a mist before my eyes. I so deeply shared his grief and sorrow. Oh father, my father, my soul cried, forgive me, forgive your child … she could do nothing else.

Now we had what we had so desperately wanted, yes, but there was no jubilation in our hearts, only a deep, utter empathy, sympathy for the suffering of our dearly beloved. In my heart there arose a fervent prayer: 'May the great sacrifice my beloved parents have made bear flowers and fruit for our people.'

That battle, the hardest one for us, is now behind us. You can imagine how grateful we are, especially now that their permission has not caused any separation between our dear ones and us, indeed has in fact tightened and strengthened those bonds.

This is indeed a blessing from God!

We are still at the threshold of life but it seems to us as though we already have a whole life behind us, a life full of internal struggles and suffering. It would fill volumes to tell you everything but you will hear of it one day, either in writing or orally. As a friend, our friend in the fullest sense, in the most beautiful meaning of that word, you have a right to know our entire life, and that you will.

Now that I look back on that past I can see clearly the hand of God and I recognize and recall in deepest gratitude that our Father never deserted us in the most difficult moments.

Who sent us friends at the appropriate time when we, totally alone, wrestling with our problems, were on the point of sinking in despair? Who sent

total strangers here from afar, this forgotten corner, to reignite courage and hope in desperate hearts? Coincidence! – no, it was no coincidence, it was the will of God. It was God our Father who sent them here to give the young struggling souls renewed strength and courage. That meeting was a turning point in our lives. Before that we were still hesitant but thereafter we were determined to achieve our goal, whatever it might cost.[197]

Before it seemed mysterious; now is it obvious, clear and simple. God alone knows the mystery of the world. His hand directs the universe. It is He who brings together widely separate paths to create entirely new ones. In this way He directed the path of those friends to join with ours so that we, strengthened by that meeting, united with larger, stronger souls, could forge a new path for those who stand behind us. We had never met them before and we knew nothing about them. Then, all of a sudden we stood face to face and these souls who until that minute were strangers to each other, immediately radiated a love for each other. We were in each other's company for only a few hours, when we parted we knew that we had friends for the rest of our lives.

The miracle had begun and it went on! One month after this meeting something happened that we never thought would be possible. You no doubt know that for young Javanese women to go out in public is against adat, that they should always stay behind the stone or bamboo wall until some unknown who 'God has intended to be her spouse' comes to claim her and take her to his dwelling.

It is only recently that that we got to know the world, or freedom, whatever you want to call it, to be able to flow with the currents along iron rails. What was never anticipated happened: we went to Batavia to stay with our new friends. 'It is as if I had to cross the entire length of Java just to find you; I was looking for you, I had to find you. And when I had found you I was so content.'

We were destined to meet each other, to meet her to exercise a great influence over our lives.

Before they came we were already drifting but we were still surrounded by darkness. Unconsciously, without wanting to, they gave a clear direction to our as yet directionless drifting. That is where we had to go, along that path to reach our ideal.

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[197] The reference is to the Abendanon visit.

I hope to write to you at length about religion in a following letter. It is wonderful that you want to write to us about this and that we can write freely to you about it. Let me now only say, to put you at ease: you can be assured that we will always remain what we are. We fervently hope with you that one day we might be granted the ability to make the form of our religion pleasing in the eyes of those who think differently.

We have always understood that the core of all religions is the Good, that all religions are good and beautiful. But oh, what have people not turned this into!

Religion is intended as a blessing, to form a bond between all God's creatures, white or brown, of whatever social standing, sex, religion; we are all children of one Father, of one God. There is no God but God! This is what we Muslims say, and with us, all believers, monotheists: God is the Lord, the Creator of the Universe.

Children of one Father, in other words, brothers and sisters, should love each other; that is the basis of all religions. Oh, if only this was understood and followed religion would be for mankind what its original heavenly purpose was: a blessing! It was this that had so turned us against religion, that the followers of one despised the followers of another, hated them and, yes, sometimes even attacked them. But enough about this.

No, alas – Dutch is the only European language that we read, which is a great regret to us. We would love to learn modern languages. It is our dream to be able one day to enjoy the beautiful works of foreign writers in their original. There is no opportunity to learn languages here. At the moment we are beginning to learn French that a friend of ours, a teacher who your husband met when he was here, is willing to help us with.

Are there no Dutch translations of Lessing,[198] the one you were referring to, or the biography of Pandita Ramabai?[199] We had heard of this courageous Indian before. Oh, I remember well when I first heard of that brave person. I was still young, a child of about 10 or 11, when with great emotion I read about her in the paper. I trembled with excitement: so, it is not only a white woman who is able to gain for herself an independent existence! – the brown Indian woman can also make herself free, independent. For days I thought about her and I have never been able to forget her. See what a good, courageous example is capable of – it can have such a far-reaching influence.

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198 Probably GE Lessing (1729–1781), a German poet, playwright and literary critic.

199 Kartini could have read about the well-known Indian feminist and reformer Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) in Dutch women's journals.

And now your flattering request seeking our cooperation for your Volksbibliotheek.[200] With all my heart: yes. Sister and I think it's wonderful, a privilege, to be allowed to work together with you, ergo to be able to do you a favour. We only worry whether we will be able to do it. We will do our best and if nothing intervenes we hope that before the end of the year we will be able to offer you a small contribution for your wonderful project.[201]

It's so funny, we had a feeling that you would ask us for this. A week or so before we received your letter we were sitting outside in the garden one evening; it was a moonlit night. You know, don't you, that Javanese children prefer full-moon evenings to play and sing songs outside? In front of us a small group of such little ones were playing. We remembered our own childhood years. And then suddenly I had this idea to save these happy days forever in our memory. I fetched paper and pencil and, in the moonlight, wrote down their games and songs directly from the mouths of the children. Funny isn't it, that not long afterwards I received your letter containing that request.

And now I heartily thank you, also on behalf of my sister, for the little books you sent us. You know what we said to each other after reading them? 'These little books are intended for children but parents may read them as well, they would learn so much from them.' It would take me too long to convey to you our thoughts about each individual book but believe us, rarely have we read anything that has given us such pleasure. It is not something to rush through, to enjoy for a minute and then to forget again, but something that leaves its mark in one's soul and never forgets.

It is wonderful that you intend to send us a collection of your thoughts: we thank you profusely for that! We will certainly learn a great deal from it. 'Een ernstig woord over ernstige dingen' (A serious word about serious things)[202] we regard as a sequel to some of the things you wrote in your letter. Both are a revelation for us!

Oh, we thank you so very, very much for all the treasures and pearls that you have given us. If only you could see me while I am writing this! My eyes would tell you much more than my pen or my mouth could ever do about what I feel for you deep in my heart.

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200 Nellie van Kol's publication project for a Volksbibliotheek, a 'people's library' preceded the later Dutch publications of the Maatschappij voor Goede en Goedkoope Lectuur (Society for the Good and Cheap Literature) established in 1905, later renamed the Wereldbibliotheek (World Library), a forerunner of the colonial government's Commissie voor Volkslectuur, later to be known as Balai Pustaka.

201 Mevrouw van Kol later informed Abendanon that this did not eventuate.

202 Reference to this title could not be located.

Something that is particularly dear to us and with which our Javanese hearts have been forever cemented to you, is your *Van de Reis Mee Thuisgebracht*.[203] We think it is a jewel; I can't tell you how many times we have gobbled it up, each time with renewed pleasure. I can so place myself in the shoes of that brown father whose heart you stole because of what you did for his little treasure. I can see him before me with his little child in his arms. I can see the white woman who did not think it beneath her to take a Javanese peasant child on her knee to cuddle and kiss it; to shake the hand of a simple man from the village; to drink of his drink of hospitality from such a simple bowl! How his heart must have been glowed with joy! A Javanese is so sensitive to gestures of friendliness, especially when that comes from white people who he looks up to!

Oh, if only the whites knew how little they had to do to win the heart of the brown brother. Give them love and you will receive love in return. A friendly word costs nothing and can have such consequences.

I read your 'Wat Zullen de Kinderen Lezen?'[204] in *De Gids* two years ago now. Already then it interested me. In this regard, here in our Native society there is a complete void; nothing, absolutely nothing has been done.

Oh, how privileged we are to be alive at this time; in every area there is so much to be done! We have only to stretch out our hand to find good, wonderful work to do! Wonderful, marvellous! When will our compatriots awake from their slumber, and throw themselves at the hills, the mountains of work awaiting willing hands everywhere! Will we live to see that time?

No, we shouldn't expect so much: let us just be very grateful that we can offer our contribution to prepare the path to that end.

And when will the moment come when we can, in fact, eye to eye and hand in hand, thank you for all the beautiful things you have given us and so much more. Patience! …we are full of hope and courage. We are so grateful that we have found you, we will never let you go, never!

You do want to remain our friend, our adviser, our guide don't you, always? Please say yes. It is not for one, not for two people, but for an entire nation and especially for the Javanese woman!

Of course we will be terribly saddened when the time comes when we have to say goodbye to everything and everyone, but we will go with the blessings

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203 Nellie van Kol, *Van de Reis Mee Thuisgebracht: Vertrouwelijk Gekeuvel met Grootere Kinderen* (Brought Back Home from the Journey: Confidential Discussions with Older Children), 1902.

204 Nellie van Kol, 'Wat Zullen de Kinderen Lezen?' (What Will the Children Read?), *De Gids*, 1899.

of our dear parents, that will turn the darkest night into day for us, the hottest day cool, the storm into a soft breeze. That impossibility, that which we had never imagined, which we never dreamed could happen, has happened. Our Mother, who has been raised with entirely different ideas, mostly against ours, now accepts and is going along with us, is even dreaming along with us. That is a blessing from on High from our almighty and all giving Father! Of course we did first have to take a long road of thorns until we came to the gateway which gave our ideas entry into her heart but once unlocked to us, it continues to be receptive. Our dear mother and I have had to suffer a lot before we could meet eye to eye on these issues.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

25 July 1902
Postcard

Dearest, dearest, dearest how happy we are to receive your card! Thank you, our heartfelt thanks for your great love. That was what we were lacking; a few words from you! Now that we have them we feel so rich! If I could only tell you how thankful we are for all this heavenly blessing! Heartfelt thanks, dearest, for your letter to N.v.K..[205] But enough about us.

Dearest, what terrible news your letter brought us. My dear one has been so ill, 'has been' – fortunately – isn't it so? If only instead of this postcard, I could fly to Batavia! I want very much to see you and speak with you now, especially now! How are the three of you? Deeply, fervently we hope you are in good health when you receive these few lines, the purpose of which is only to immediately reply to your letter, in accordance with the wishes of my heart. Tomorrow – or otherwise very soon, a long letter will arrive with other letters enclosed. Goodbye dearest one, stay well! Thank you! Thank you very sincerely.

Much love and kindest regards to all of you and for you a kiss from your own
K. and R.

[205] This may have been the first direct communication between these two women. Kartini was evidently relieved to have avoided a potential difference of opinion between her two 'promoters'.

To Mevrouw van Kol

27 July 1902

Naturally we will be utterly saddened when the time comes that we must bid goodbye to everyone and everything that has so long formed a part of our life. But we will go with the blessing of those we love. That will bring light into the darkest night, coolness into the hottest day, calm the storm into a gentle breeze!

It is incredible – that which we had never thought possible, and never dreamed could happen, has happened: our Moeder, who was raised with entirely different ideas, mostly contradicting ours, now accepts and goes along with ours. That is a blessing from on High from our almighty all merciful Father! We did first have to walk over a long road of thorns before we reached the gateway that opened her heart to our ideas but once open it will remain open to us. Our dear good Moeder and we have suffered much before we could reach an agreement about these questions.

From where we gained the calm, that emotional control when we were arguing in defence of our conscience, our deepest convictions, I don't know. We had not prepared what we were going to say, we could not think properly, there was so much going on in our head. But when the time came to speak it flowed out of its own accord, the right words fell from our lips. Good spirits hovered over us, our Heavenly Father stood beside us in our battle against our earthly parents. His angels placed the words in our mouth that would win the appeal.[206]

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

28 July 1902

My dear, dear angel, my warmest best wishes on your birthday, and to Mijnheer and your sister! In my thoughts I kiss you warmly on both cheeks; unspoken, in my heart, is a world of prayers, of blessings and wishes – in the very first place that God grant you better health!

To be able now, to fly with the storm across the steel grey sky, far to the West, to Batavia, so that on the morning of 1 August, I could personally smile at you, warmly squeeze your hand and embrace you!

But that of course is not possible, and although it pains me I will just have to comfort myself with paper and pen. My dearest one, how I thank you for the

[206] This is clearly only a fragment of a much longer letter.

kind words you sent me by postcard, I read them with tears in my eyes. Such a love is moving, touching, such an interest, such a sympathy, and empathy.

Dearest, if we do not now embark on our great task with courage, if we do not complete our difficult but glorious work with courage and perseverance, then we will consider ourselves without honour, because to disappoint such a love, such a trust would be a crime! That love and that faith of yours and of other loyal friends, lays upon us an onerous burden – to be and to remain worthy of it!

I have to read your card again and again, for me it is a snippet of exquisite taste!

Thank you so much for your letter to N.v.K.. Last week before the receipt of your heartfelt, warm words, a long letter of mine was sent off to Nellie, in which I told her of my angel.[207] After your postcard I sent her a few more lines to convey our deepest thanks to her for her letter to the editors of *O. en W.* and to again tell her of the one I love. I very much hope that you will meet her husband. I wrote to him after Surabaya requested that he do so. I hope he has the time to fulfil my request.

How is everything with you, now, my dear? When you receive this I fervently hope that you are once again the happy soul, no – still better – the ray of sunshine, in your home! What was it you were suffering from, dear? It was fortunate that you had your sister to look after you and attend to Mijnheer, since you could not do this yourself.

I think it is so terrible that there has been so much ill-health in your family in recent times. How many times has it now been that you have had to read a letter of mine in bed! It grieves me greatly! But no clouds last forever. Out of the darkest night sometimes the most beautiful mornings are born. And that is my comfort. Human life is a true mirror image of nature. What we pray for, to God, day and night, is: strength!

The rain, which causes one plant to shoot into leaf and bud, smashes another to the ground and causes it to perish! However here I am voicing my opinions again in this conceited way. Forgive me!

Together with this mail we are sending you a small piece of handicraft. Although it is neither a Native nor an original piece, merely imitation, we have worked on it with love and so hope that you will appreciate it for that reason and also as a souvenir of what for us have been tense days.

In the parcel I have included a small article that we read recently in *De Locomotief*, in fact a few days after that paper had reprinted the article by

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[207] See Kartini's letter to Nellie van Kol, 21 July 1902.

Mev. v. K. in the *Kol[oniaal] Weekblad*. What a coincidence was it not? Do read it if you have the time – 'Modern women'. It provided us with a very pleasant morning, we had to laugh so much. The quotation from Anna de Savornin Lohman, which I underlined with a blue pencil, was the same one that I had once used in a letter to my 'friend' to thank him for the wonderful present of a book.[208] The quotation from A. de S.L. served the purpose of letting him know that I understood his intention very well. Nice to read these words again in an article where the new woman is so idolized!!! And it is certainly a nice coincidence that the item appeared shortly after Nellie's letter.

The small roll of paper inside the handiwork contains a letter from Mev. v.K. and the one from me that she wants to publish. A week or so ago I let Boesono read it. He had no objection with regard to the content but asked for his sake that its publication be delayed a little. The reason: fear of the R[esident] who would see in the letter how fond we are of the v.K. family. The R. bears a strong grudge against Heer v. K. because of his remarks about his distressed districts.[209]

Just imagine what Ma had to experience at his reception which our parents attended just before Annie left for Batavia. Conversation turned to the subject of Heer v. K., and Mev. V., his sister, carried on terribly about Heer v. K, against whom she hurled a string of 'affectionate' words and directed all this to Mama, as if Mama could help it that Heer v. K. has expressed unfavourable opinions about those districts while having only praise for Jepara and all of us. I need hardly say how mean we considered this. The following day Mama went to the residency house to demand an explanation from Mev.V.[210] for her words but Ma only met the old Mev. S[ijthoff]; the daughter was unwell! I tell you this in the strictest confidence. We are thus under suspicion of having stirred up trouble. You know that Heer v.K. came here specially and solely for us two. It was maintained in front of Ma that Heer v.K. who had declared he would stay nowhere but in hotels, nevertheless had stayed with us. Unstated

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208 Kartini had earlier noted that 'her friend' had given her a carefully selected collection of writing on 'the women question'. The ironic tone here was due to the fact both knew that de Savornin Lohman represented the views of conservative Christian women.

209 Regarding Boesono see above Kartini's letter of 15 July 1902. Henri van Kol reported critically on Resident Sijthoff's administration in his published account of his study tour, blaming it for the regular experience of flood, drought and starvation in the region. Sijthoff responded with a spirited defence of his administration in a 1902 report to the government.

210 This woman's relationship to Resident Sijthoff is not clear. Presumably 'old Mev S' is Sijthoff's mother.

assumption: there had to be a reason for this and what else than that we had been brewing trouble.[211] Oh we find it so mean, so mean.

The reason that Heer v. K. did want to stay with us was that he wanted to get to know us – and Annie and I had spoken to him the most. 'He can do nothing to my father,' said Boesono, 'but he can to us. Think of my difficult circumstances. Wait awhile till my situation has improved a little.'

I told him that he does not have to feel at all ashamed about his demotion since it is not a punishment – and he is totally without blame. He had better make sure that it stayed that way and that nothing ill could ever be said of him or that he could ever be charged with anything. But now that Mev v.K.'s letter has appeared in the paper and anyone can gauge from it what our relationship is, we no longer consider that reason for delaying the publication any longer relevant, do you not agree? Now we will have to, we must publish the letter, now it is our duty both for the cause and for ourselves; because now the world is half informed, the curiosity of the public has been aroused, and people are searching and guessing and mostly they prefer to guess incorrectly.

So now we will have to. And as to my concern about the immediate publication because of the marriage question: Moedertje Mies[212] wrote to say that she hoped very much that it would be printed.

'You have to accept the one with the other, child!' And it is better this way – to be open about it right from the beginning – to acknowledge before the entire Native population of what mind we are. It must not to be able to be said of us that we came amongst them under a false disguise. They are free to come to us or to turn away from us.

From other friends we received a postcard this afternoon saying: 'Do it! – you must – go on!' It sounds like martial music, brisk, powerful, uplifting. Would you now, when you have the time and the inclination, read both letters? You will find much that is familiar to you in mine. On page 4 I marked several sentences and on another piece of paper I have written down a few questions. Would you now be so kind as to show both pages to Mijnheer? I should very much like to have answers to these questions in the interests of the cause. Let Mijnheer read the entire letter would you?

It is possible, aside from the sentences I have noted, that there are other weak spots in the letter. That we have to be well-armed, before we publish

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211 Conservative and colonial business interests were suspicious of van Kol as leader of a socialist party and the leading and most outspoken critic of colonial policy in the Dutch parliament and the press.

212 The reference is to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer.

something like this is self-evident. Much depends on that letter. It is of no consequence that I shall be strongly attacked on the marriage question, for that I am prepared – but on other matters such as those I have indicated, I want to arm myself.

I have already made enquiries about the number of Native girls undertaking European education. I also asked Mej. Gerlings at Manonjaya about her school.[213]

You are the first of our friends in Java to read my letter to Mev. van Kol in its entirety, and will probably remain the only one until it is read by everyone because I do not intend to first circulate it. We should like to have both your opinions on it, before indicating 'yes' to Mev. v.K. and I am also waiting for the requested information. I had asked Mev. v.K. for a postponement – reason: I was seeking some evidence to strengthen some points of my argument. Do you not think it is better this way?

Father will send in the petition – we are only waiting on news from Heer van Kol in Batavia. We can count on it that uncle will do everything in his power to obstruct us – first through Father and if that does not work – then through other means. It is even possible that his advice will be sought because he has such a good name and is in such good standing with the Government. But then Mijnheer will be there to support us, will he not? If I were requesting the education of the Javanese people, then I would be the first, to support someone wanting to be educated and particularly if it is for the benefit of the people for whom I am requesting the education.[214]

In time I hope to show with deeds what I am now pleading for with words and I shall help every single person working towards their self-improvement. To work against them – never I hope – God preserve me from so doing.

If advice should be requested from the Resident then we also already know more or less what this would be: 'we are at the very least mad'. Our Ass. Res will also 'praise us to the heavens'. He recently asked Annie if I really meant what I said. It was nonsense – and so on! Annie had asked him whether it was because he knew us so well that it was possible for him to judge us in this way. He then retreated, acknowledged that he hardly knew us and that it was only his private opinion. We were with him just now and he uttered not a word about it.

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213 See Kartini's earlier reference to this school in the letter of 21 July 1902. Mej. Gerlings was evidently the teacher. This may be one further example of the range of Kartini's correspondence which is no longer extant.

214 This appears to be an uncharacteristically forceful demand that Abendanon support her request to study in the Netherlands in the face of conservative colonial or Javanese opposition, indicating a renewed determination following van Kol's visit.

Someone else thought it terribly funny that the Native aristocracy met on friendly terms with the Dutch social democracy![215]

I asked Ma how she would reply if she was attacked about us. And her words were so straightforward, yet so effective. I will tell you some other time what she said, together with other things about our dear Moeder.

We have once again thoroughly reconsidered the question and we are staying with our first idea: Holland![216]

But now I have tired you too much.

Goodbye dear one, again best wishes on your birthday. Give Mijnheer and your sister our kindest regards. You I press close to my heart, my own dear angel – goodbye!

Your dearest beloved
Kartini

To EC Abendanon

8 August 1902

Letters play an important role in our lives, we can be thankful for almost everything to them. Without our correspondence we would never have got as far as we are now, that we dare break with primordial traditions and customs. You don't know, well actually you do of course, what those letters from our friends, superior in both mind and soul, have been to us. It exudes a purifying, uplifting influence; it develops us in spirit and mind. So much that is beautiful, dear, priceless has come to us through the mail, pearls, precious stones for the heart and the head.

Oral conversations may lodge in our soul but you will have to admit that time fades many a word, even if the main idea remains unaffected. Letters repeat every word, precisely, for all time, as often as you want.[217]

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215 Kartini was clearly quite aware of the political implications of associating with the leader of the Dutch socialist party.

216 Kartini here forcefully reasserts her view against that of Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri not to go to Holland. This is an unusually curt statement and appears to have been purposefully left to the end of the letter.

217 This is evidently only a fragment.

To Heer van Kol

10 August 1902

What you have written to us is something Moeder[218] has often said to us: 'All talents are merely gifts from Gusti Allah'. 'Don't ever imagine when you have done something good that it is your own, totally your own work. We are simply the servant, the ones who carry out His will.' Talent, skills, are entrusted to us: our duty is to care well for them.'

And it is in terms of that conviction that Moeder, who had been raised in an entirely different environment than us, and only after much struggling, has given us her permission. We did not force her to do this. She now fully accepts it and she even dreams along with us! When people attack her about us, her answer is simple: 'They are our children but not our possessions. They belong to Him who created them, and who is their Owner who directs their fate and their lives. There are many roads, familiar and unfamiliar, that lead to the Good.'

How happy Moeder will be when we tell her what you have told us.

Moeder is not home at the moment: she is tending to our ill sister. Moeder is so thankful to our Friend for what we have been enabled to find. 'I long to meet Mevrouw van Kol to thank her that she has opened your hearts. She is not of our faith but what does that matter, her God is our God, the God of us all.'[219]

It was good that you warned us against vanity. We thank you heartily for that. But don't worry, we are the children of a Father who has a position of great power and respect – you who knows our society knows what that means, where power and respect is all, where prestige and glory is regarded as the pinnacle of good fortune. From our earliest years we have come into contact with flattery, we have become sick of it. It pains us so to see elderly folk, grey hairs, crawl before children. It is adat! Can't we rid ourselves of all this, we have never wanted it, that we were foot-kissed.

There is much that has led us to ponder and think and it is becoming clearer and clearer to us: it is a duty, a heavy duty, to do with all our strength – to make that popular reverence worthwhile. The motto of the native aristocracy should be: 'The nobility is worthy of the respect of the people!'

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218 The reference is to Kartini's birth mother, Ibu Ngasirah.

219 This confirms Kartini's previous references to her renewed religious belief in earlier correspondence with Nellie van Kol. This had evidently transformed her relationship with her mother, the daughter of a leading local kiayi, following the 'crisis' surrounding the question of her studying in the Netherlands. Kartini later confirms this turn-around in her letter to EC Abendanon of 15 August 1902.

From only very few people do we care to hear kind words that we regard above any kind of flattery. Their words of appreciation provide an inspirational, on-going support for us, it strengthens, encourages us to continue on the path of the Good.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

10 August 1902

My dear angel, in my thoughts I kiss that dear hand which has written the letter that we have just received with the greatest pleasure. You have made us very happy with it, but not totally; besides the deepest gratitude for all that love and warmth, there is also melancholy because of your sadness! My poor dear one, if only I could, if only I was allowed, to help carry your burden, I would do it so willingly, with love! My love can only reach you from a distance, but if it could but comfort you a little, then I would be grateful.

I would kneel before you, fold my hands and ask you, plead: let me share the burden of your suffering! Dearest, dearest that I, so far away, can do nothing for you! God knows how much I would love to scatter flowers in your path. Full of flowers, full of sunshine, with my whole heart that is what I would wish for your life! There is so much melancholy in what you write, it brought tears to my eyes.

If love can comfort you, cheer up, believe that we with all our heart and soul adore you, love you, honour you, my angel, my <u>mother</u>! My mother is you, not of the flesh but of the best of that which is me: my soul!

Now more than ever I long to wrap my arms around you in reality, to place my heart, that beats so warmly for you, next to your heart.

We are in seventh heaven that you are so delighted by our message of love of 1 August. It is wonderful what you have written about Nellie van Kol! Thank you dearest, thank you for your love!

Do not be concerned – your little girlfriends are in good hands. Also do not worry, should we go to that far-off land! There is a Father, who watches over us, there are trustworthy, experienced guides, who will support us if we should stumble. Do not be concerned, Nellie will be a loyal and true <u>Friend</u> to us – you believe that too, do you not? We – we are utterly convinced of it.

Yesterday we received a letter from Heer van Kol – it's wonderful, marvellous, dearest, he will visit you. He hopes in consultation with our Friend to develop some plans. We are so grateful. He sent us an extract from a letter from his wife – 'but on no account become conceited!' he said. I can see so clearly how he

must have looked when he wrote this. Just consider how we are being spoiled: today from you, yesterday from Heer v.K., and the day before yesterday a long wonderful letter also from Nellie, and books, amongst which – oh wonderful! – the meditations of such a high standing and highly cultured woman![220] Well may we ask: 'God, what have we done to deserve this?'

Moeder is teaching us to humbly look to Him in our joy and sorrow. Asking his forgiveness, always! Nellie writes that Mev. van Zuylen[221] is hoping as fervently as she herself does, that our situation will be speedily settled. There will be others who would agree, would there not, dearest?

With this, 2 short letters.[222] Would you read them? – and later please return them. We can use them later to our advantage.

Recently I received another request to have a letter of mine published – it is about a Jav. wedding. Hilda de Booij – wife of the adj. of His Excellency on behalf of her brother or father, Mr Charles Boissevain[223] – 'I would benefit my people by this means.' I am beginning to be afraid to write!

I am at the moment busy with letters for Henriette van der Meij[224] – and Javanese fairy tales for Nellie.[225]

Ma is not home at the moment. Kardinah has been very ill, malaria. Her situation last Monday and Tuesday was critical, now, thank God, improving, and has been taken to Tegal. How unhappy we felt you can imagine.

Oh yes, from Didi a divine letter – an entire chapter – full of beautiful thoughts, it did us such a lot of good. Dear, dear boy, we are so glad that we know him. Also from Mary a sweet letter.

Perhaps you read in the paper that the Ovink family will soon be going to Holland – possibly next month already. Poor Friends – it is terrible for Heer O., we always knew him as a stalwart and upright public servant, incapable of any dishonourable action. It is shameful treatment, it has happened before![226] Oh! but by a stroke of good luck: Mr Quartero is taking his place. Both

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220 This is may be a reference to Nellie van Kol's *Moeder en Kind* (1898), republished 1902.

221 Mevrouw N. van Zuylen-Tromp was president of Oost and West, the organization that had a prominent role in promoting colonial reform and promoting interest in Javanese arts and crafts.

222 It is not clear who the writer of these letters was.

223 This is a reference to Kartini's lengthy account of Kardinah's wedding. Charles Boissevain (1842–1927) was editor of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, a prominent Amsterdam newspaper.

224 See letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 14 March 1902.

225 See also Kartini's letter to Nellie van Kol, 20 August 1902.

226 Mr Ovink, who had left Jepara in 1899 for an appointment as assistant resident of Jombang. There he was later accused of an administrative misdemeanour and resigned.

are good friends of ours. We passed on to Anneke your regards and your message!

Shortly you will hear from us again.

Goodbye beloved! Give your loved ones our regards, you we give a warm kiss, with a deep love, your own

Kartini

The day before yesterday it was two years since our hands first met in an affectionate grasp.

To Stella Zeehandelaar

15 August 1902

Nellie's enthusiastic words in *Oost en West* have been reprinted here in several journals and, amongst others, *De Echo* has written in support asking all women in the Indies for their support and cooperation for our cause. And it is working. *De Echo*, like Nellie, included some lines from my letter in its article and requested permission to reprint it in its entirety or some extracts from it. In my opinion it is better if we do not; one published letter is enough and the one to Nellie throws enough light on the matter.

Someone else also asked me permission to publish a letter of mine about a Javanese wedding. It is Hilda de Booij, the daughter of Mr Charles Boissevain, director of the *Algemeen Handelsbank*[227]. She sent a copy of the letter home and now her brother, who is the secretary of the editorial board, writes that publication of the letter would do a lot for my people. The Netherlands would come to understand from such letters more clearly than from anything else that the Javanese people in many ways are their equals and perhaps in more ways than one, their superiors. This is according to Mr Boissevain.[228]

What do you think of that, Stella? I am busy preparing an article for *Belang en Recht*. I hope it will be published. I am working on it with much pleasure. If it is not accepted then I will rewrite it to send it to another paper or journal.[229]

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227 Kartini's reference to '*Handelsbank*' appears to be a misunderstanding. Hilda's father was Charles Boissevain, editor of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. He was regarded as a progressive cultural figure. There was another Boissevain who was the director of the Algemeen Handelsbank in Semarang.

228 This view essentially concurs with Kartini's own belief in her role as an interpreter of Javanese culture and society as reiterated in this letter to Stella. It defines the essence of her Javanese national consciousness at this time.

229 As far as can be ascertained, such an article did not eventuate.

For Nellie we are busy gathering Javanese fairytales and Sister R is busy preparing drawings for it.[230] Oh, Stella, what a treasure trove of beautiful things we have heard from the common people; wisdom, truth, so clear, so simple and yet such melodious words! To have complete mastery of your language and then to explain that beautiful blessed music to your people. If you people only understood the soul of our people, how you would then find yourselves attracted to us. We are still so close to nature, to the origins. Our wisdom does not need any great intelligence to understand. The words are simple, but how beautiful its tone and its rhythms. If I could only teach you my language so that you could enjoy its beauty in its original state. The more I penetrate into the deepest regions of the soul of our people, the more superior I find it.

Wise men and poets can be encountered amongst your people, usually from amongst certain classes, but culture is only found in certain classes; the large majority, that is the masses, may I say it, is rough. There are some superior souls amongst the working classes but what about the majority Stella? You know this better than I.

But if one should one walk around in a kampong or desa, just enter the rickety huts of the poor, listen to them speaking, to their thoughts … They are illiterate people, all of them, but what verbal music can issue from many of these people, what utter beauty is expressed in them. Soft and modest by nature, simple and humble! When I am finally with you I will tell you so much, so much about our people, about their thoughts and attitudes. You must get to know them and love them as we do.

You will find so many poets and artists amongst them and a people who have a feeling for poetry, for the most beautiful and lovely things in life, cannot be at too low a level of spiritual civilisation.

Everything that is beautiful and noble in life is poetry. Love, devotion, loyalty, belief, art – everything that uplifts, ennobles and beautifies is poetry. And the Javanese people and poetry are so intimately intertwined. What do you think of a child who approaches an old woman to beg for 'A flower that brings sweet perfume to my heart.'

> 'Nuwun sekar melati
> hingkang sekar hing punjering ati.'

The least, the very humblest Javanese, is poetic. What do you think of the deep respect which younger people show their elders? What do you think of

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230 No examples of such writing and illustrations could be located and may not have eventuated.

the deep piety of the living towards their ancestors? There is no celebration in which the ancestors are not remembered, their blessing and that of the heavens appealed to. In joy and in suffering we continue to remember our dead.[231]

And the name of 'mother', how holy it is! In time of doubt, of pain, pale lips will always murmur that name. It is 'MOTHER' and once again 'MOTHER' who is appealed to when we need help, when we need support.

The honour of motherhood is expressed each time her name is called out in serious and painful moments. Why do we not appeal to our father, why specifically to our mother? Because from birth a person feels instinctively that 'mother' means a world of love and devotion! Each time something is dropped, it is picked up with the expression, 'Oh Allah, my child!' What is intended by that expression, what it represents, do I need to make it any clearer to you?

Stella, I am seriously studying your language so that one day I can master it, so that I can explain to your people everything of ours that is so beautiful. I'm also devoting myself to my own language; I want to teach our people about the white race as I know it in all its fine and noble qualities. They must come to know the noble and the great whom you have, to respect and love them, this they must do.

Sometimes I wish I had two sets of hands to be able to do everything I wish to do. The will is great but the energy is weak. I must not sacrifice my health in this struggle, that is the silliest thing I could do. And yet, I'm so often foolish; I often sit till late into the night, which is not good for me. In this way I might not achieve my goals: I want to work hard but at the end of the day it is possible I might not be able to work because of physical weakness. That would be terrible. Therefore I am now doing my best to temper my activities and live sensibly.

To EC Abendanon

15 August 1902

… afterwards when more favourable reports about her began to emerge (thank God the doctor has determined that Sister has now totally recovered) there was another obstacle, now of a more pleasant nature, fortunately. Heer

[231] This celebration of Javanese traditional values is in marked contrast to the attitudes Kartini was expressing at the beginning of her correspondence with Stella. It further suggests a new mood already reflected in correspondence with and concerning Nellie van Kol.

Lawick van Pabst who had brought Heer Zimmerman[232] with him, whom you probably know came to visit.

Hooray for the native arts and crafts: they are heading towards a fine future! I can't tell you how grateful and happy I am about this. We so love to admire our people, we so love to feel proud of them. Our people are so little known and … so misunderstood.

The future of our Jepara craftsmen is assured.

Heer van Zimmerman was in ecstasy about what he saw here of the artistic work produced by this so often scantily regarded brown race. Woodcarving, goldsmithing, textile crafts are carried out here at a significant level. Our artists have just received a large order from Oost en West for St Nicolaas.[233] We are so pleased: now these clever artists can give expression to their fine ideas, shape their poetic thoughts into beautiful forms, create the artistic flowing designs, with their beautiful lines and curves, the shimmering, glowing colour combinations.

* * * *

Oh it is a joy, it is divine, to look for what is beautiful in everything. That God-spark is within us all and in everything, even in what appears to be totally bad. This certainty must be absorbed by as many as possible and those must then regard it as their duty to beautify life for both others and for themselves.

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… Every object that drops from our hand is picked up, accompanied by the cry: 'Oh Allah, my child. What is the meaning of this, what is it a sign of, must I explain this to you?'[234] A child once approached an elderly woman who, when asked what she wanted since she owned nothing, neither something nice to eat, nor jewelry, nor clothes, answered: 'I long for neither something nice to eat, nor jewelry nor clothes. Oh Mother, give me the flower that blooms in your heart.' What do you think of that? Oh, and you should hear this story in its original, the request of the child sounds so sweet, and profound in the

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232 Th V van Zimmerman was instrumental in developing an interest in Native arts and crafts.

233 St Nicolaas, or Sinterklaas, falls on 6 December and is traditionally the time for giving presents to children.

234 The sentence with which this extract begins may suggest that Kartini had been describing other instances from Javanese daily life.

language of flowers: 'Njuwun sekar melatii, hingkkang mekar hing punjering ati.'[235]

And something like this one hears time and time again. We are now engaged in writing everything down, everything that is beautiful that we hear coming from the mouths of the ordinary people. The word 'poem' does not exist in our language, we say 'the language of flowers'. Isn't that appropriate?

We are also busy learning songs, not songs of jubilation – have you ever heard those? The gamelan never sounds jubilant, even at the wildest festivities it sounds its melancholy song, perhaps for that reason. Life is melancholy, not a shout of joy!

I wrote the previous pages to such sweet caressing melancholic strains. It was evening: windows and doors stood wide open. The flowering cempaka in front of our room brings us the soft breeze that rustles through its foliage, its perfumed breath in greeting. I sat on the floor, like now, at a low table, to the left of my sister Roekmini, who was also writing, and to the right of Annie Glaser, also sitting on the floor, sewing, and before me, a woman who read to us from a songbook. It was heavenly. A beautiful dream embodied in pure, serene, sonorous tones which carried our trembling souls upwards to the kingdom of the fortunate.

How I wished then that you were here sitting with us as part of our little circle, you would feel, enjoy dream along with us. To dream! Life is not a dream but a cold, impersonal, reality but the reality need not be ugly if one does not want it to be. It is not inherently so, it is beautiful wherever there is beauty within us.

Oh, and that is the reason why I would wish that as part of an education, attention is also paid to character formation and, in the first place, on the development of willpower. Education must develop this in a child, always, always …

But now I have shifted to another subject. I wanted to talk to you about our people, not about education, I can do that later can't I?

There is an old woman here whom I begged flowers from, the ones that bring joy to the heart. She has given me much and she has much, much more to give and I want more, much more. She wants to give me more but I have to earn it, I have to buy her flowers …but with what? With what can I pay her?

In a very serious voice she said: 'Fast for one day and one night and spend that time awake and alone.'

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235 Kartini provide a translation of the Javanese when she repeats this sentiment and Javanese saying in a letter to Nellie van Kol, 20 August 1902.

Through night to light
Through storm to rest
Through battle to honour
Through suffering to joy[236]

These words sounded in my ear like a requiem.

That is the meaning, the idea behind what the old woman said. Fasting and being awake is symbolic for 'doing without, suffering, meditating one's way towards the light!' There is no light that is not preceded by darkness. Don't you think that is beautiful? Doing without is the mind conquering the flesh. Loneliness is the school for meditation.[237]

As a child I did all those things as a matter of course, without questioning because others had done the same before me and with me. Then a time came when my heart began to ask questions: 'Why am I doing this? Why is it like this? Why. Why? I kept asking.'

And then I decided to no longer do that for which I did not know the reason. I no longer wanted to do anything as a matter of habit, without knowing the why and the wherefore. I no longer wanted to learn to read the Koran or to learn to recite proverbs in a foreign language of which I did not understand the meaning as probably neither did my male and female teachers. 'Tell me what it means and I will learn it all.' I had sinned. The book of books is too holy to be made comprehensible to us.

We chose to no longer fast or do other things that we had once done without thinking and that now, when we thought about it, we could no longer do. People were in despair – we were in despair. No one could explain that which was incomprehensible to us. As God is our witness, our hell and heaven was our own conscience. If we did something bad, our conscience punished us, if we did good, our conscience rewarded us.

The years came and went… We are Muslims, because we are descendants of Mohammed, but we were so in nothing more than name only. God, Allah was only an exclamation for us, a word, a sound without meaning. We lived on in this way – until that day came that brought a turnabout in our spiritual lives.

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236 See the introduction for a discussion of this verse which appeared to have provided the title for the publication of her letters in 1911.

237 Here Kartini is reaching deep into the Javanese tradition. This and the preceding letters indicate a new assertiveness of her Javanese culture where previously her letters were more concerned to demonstrate her knowledge of and competence in contemporary European culture.

We have found Him, for Whom our souls had unconsciously been thirsting for a long, long time. We had searched for so long, far and wide; we did not know that it was so close by, always surrounding us. It is inside us.

Who enabled us to find Him? It had been fermenting within us for a long time but the person who enabled us to find what we had sought for so long is: Nellie van Kol. And who now leads us and shows us the way to Him: it is Mama.

How stupid we have been, silly, to have a mountain of treasures beside us all our lives and not to see it, not to realize it was there.[238]

Stupid, silly, opinionated, pedantic people that we are. Oh, you can't know how happy Mama, and along with her all the old folk here, are about this turnaround in our life. There is not a word of reproach on their tongues, and where we make ourselves the most serious reproaches about our assumptions, pedantry, and arrogance they just say softly, comfortingly, conciliatorily, 'It was God who only now wished to open your hearts, be grateful for that!'

Oh if I could only tell you in detail how calm and peaceful it now is inside us, how grateful and happy, how safe and assured we now feel, now that we have found Him, now that we know – feel – that there is always Someone by us who watches over us. That Someone will be our support, our comfort our safe refuge for the rest of our lives. We can feel that.

To EC Abendanon

17 August 1902

Good morning, here is your sister again to come and have a chat with you. It is a beautiful fresh morning. I am sitting here in a cosy corner by the window from which I have a view of the garden. Another time I should give you a description of our surroundings, our house, our dunia and … our cloister. But now I am going to continue our chat of yesterday.

Oh it is so touching to see the joy of our parents witnessing the return to the right path of the sheep that had lost their way. One of the elderly here was so happy about it that she offered me her collection of books, old Javanese manuscripts, many written in Arabic. This we are going to learn to read and write again. You may know that Javanese books are very hard to get because

238 This significant letter confirms Kartini's 'reconciliation' with her cultural roots, including her religion.

they are written by hand, very few are printed. We are now busy trying to read a beautiful poem, wise teaching in flower language.[239]

How I wish you knew our language. Oh, I would love to let you enjoy the beauty of the original; once translated it is no longer what it was. Such a pity that Batavia is so very far away from here. What a joy it might otherwise have been to teach you Javanese and to learn other European languages from you. It is clear from this and that?? that you have a feeling for languages – are we right? Would you like to learn the Javanese language? It is certainly difficult, but oh, so beautiful! It is a language of the emotions – full of poetry and … repartee. We, the children of this country, are often astounded at the swift repartee of our compatriots. You can't say anything without them making something out of it. Name something, anything at random, point to some object, and a Javanese with a good sense of humour – and you will find many amongst the ordinary folk – will immediately make up a rhyme that will amaze you with its wittiness and funniness. It is a characteristic of Eastern people, I think.

It is only a pity that when that marvellous talent was being distributed your sisters were standing right at the back! This is certainly not to fish for compliments, believe me; we mean it sincerely. Where the fairies were miserly in handing out wittiness, another fairy corrected this evil by generously granting us her talent: sensitivity. I even think she was a little too charitable, that this virtue has become a vice. Being sensitive is good but being over-sensitive, on the other hand, is not. Sooner or later, and perhaps already, you will notice that your sisters often find it difficult to find a happy medium. For someone of extremes this is very, very difficult. In openly admitting my faults I am also implying a request – have you understood that? This is: help me to correct my faults, to overcome them. Will you do that? … Will you? When your sisters refer to things that are not good? Will you? Would you, as we would expect from a good brother and friend? You will very soon get a sense of my character from my letters, then you will know what terrible defects it has.

Do you still remember the letter you wrote in January in which you talked about the music and tone of the spoken word, about artists and sensitive people? In this regard our friend the philosopher and the poet has provided a beautiful lesson. If you were with us every day you would know how we have taken that to heart. You would then know that sorrow now serves us, not we it. Rooting around in one's own emotional wounds means: harbouring suffering

[239] Here Kartini confirms her 'conversion' and rediscovery of her Javanese-ness which she ascribed to the influence of the correspondence with Nellie van Kol.

in your heart. And our duty is to try with all our might to master that sorrow, it must serve our needs, we must build on it.

After having had days of rain, we have finally had the opportunity to go and check on our flower children that had suffered badly from the copious rainwater. We saw our badly damaged rose bushes full of green buds. The days came and went … our roses were green again and in full bloom… Rain, rain is what they needed to bloom so beautifully again.

Rain, rain is what the soul needs to grow and blossom.

Now we know. Our tears in the past serve merely to germinate the seeds from which grow a new, nobler, love of life in the future.

Don't struggle against it, don't complain or wish sorrow away when it comes. Because sorrow has a right to exist, has its own calling. Allow yourself willingly to be strengthened by sorrow, which it will if you are good of heart. It is so true: 'the same fire that purifies gold turns wood into ash.'

But now I should tell you how we got to know Nellie van Kol. Perhaps you have already read something about it in the papers. In that case what follows will provide an explanation. In the second half of April Heer van Kol stayed with us one night. A Dutch lady who is very supportive of what your sisters are striving for, sent him to us for that reason.[240] It was one of the nicest encounters we have ever had.

Although he had long won our hearts for what he has done for Java and the Javanese, meeting him personally has ensured our love and respect. It is wonderful to meet superior people. Oh, it does one such good, such good. When we met your dear parents it was such an important event in our lives – you know that was a turning point in our lives. That meeting was the awakening to real life: before that we were alive in name only, actually we had been sleeping, had been continually asleep and dreaming. Now we are alive, fighting and wrestling, hoping and despairing, suffering and rejoicing, weeping and cheering; that is life! We have risen to the heights of the sun in our enjoyment, we have descended to the depths of misery. You know all that from your mother and I am happy that I am alive.

I know from your Mother that you are sympathetic to what we are trying to do, to our ideas, as you have told us yourself. So it will no doubt please you that others, and not just anyone but more superior people, are supportive of our mission. These others are: Heer van Kol and his wife.

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240 This repeats her account of how Stella arranged for Henri van Kol to visit her during his tour of the colony.

Aren't you pleased that what your sisters are involved in has found a strong defender in Holland, in the country's parliament? He will do everything he can to help realize the ideas of your sisters. When we discussed our deepest thoughts time and again he asked us to write to his wife: she could be a trusted and honest adviser for us. I was moved by the way he spoke about his wife – full of respect and admiration, as his guide and adviser! This is a man – and what a man! – who spoke in this fashion about his wife. These were for us moments of great joy. Oh, and there are more men like that, who see in women the embodiment of higher things and who respect them for of it.

I didn't let the grass grow under my feet. Immediately after Heer van Kol's departure I wrote to his wife. Was it instinct or something else, I don't know. What I do know is that I had no sense of writing to a stranger, which she in fact was when I wrote to her, just as it was here, with her husband. It was as if she was a mother to me; without hesitation I poured out my thoughts to her. With her husband I was able to speak in complete confidence, to explain myself. He was so straightforward, so friendly, approached us in such a hearty fashion, he was so fatherly towards us.

I am pleased that I followed the voice of my heart and wrote immediately to Mevrouw van Kol. We immediately received a letter back from her – and what a letter it was! We feel so rich for the love that poured out from her for us. God has again granted us a warm heart of a friend and via that friendly heart He allowed us to find Him. If only I could tell you how happy we are! We are not jubilantly happy, but quietly, intensely happy, grateful, pleased about what we have found. Just recently we received another letter from Nellie, one full of beautiful, wonderfully noble thoughts. Such a stream of goodness pours out of her. It is a blessing from God that we have been able to meet this pure, superior person.

'We are the real friends of humanity,' she says, 'if we seek our support not in the first instance in people, but exclusively within ourselves and in God the Father.' For that we are very, very grateful to Nellie, more so than for anything else that she has done and will do for us. What she gave us of herself was the love in her heart, in her soul. Then she continues: 'The dearest and best people are just weak, fallible beings. Nestle yourself at the heart of the Father. He shall heal your wounds, dry your tears.'

At the time when I was working on this letter we experienced something most unpleasant, which before we met Nellie would have made us despair. But now we did not look for comfort from people, we held fast to His hand. And the darkness gave way to light, and the storm turned into a breeze.

We are not afraid, absolutely not afraid; wherever we are there also is God who watches over us, who observes us, who judges us with love. Why should we be concerned about people, when we know God! It is His work that we do; He will give us the strength to do it. We are prepared, prepared for anything, prepared to give everything: ourselves and to receive anything: mortal wounds. Tears, blood, will flow, so much, but that will be nothing. All that will finally lead to triumph. There is no light that has not been preceded by darkness. Daybreak is born from the night.

Now that we have found Him it is as if life has become more beautiful: our mission seems more noble, more splendid; of a higher order. The Spirit gives a higher purpose to everything!

What do you think about all this Edie? I know one thing for certain: that you are happy for your sisters for everything. But now I have not yet told you what we want: to go to Holland to be prepared for our task. Sister Roekmini wants to train in the arts to attend a drawing academy to later be able to devote herself to the revival of native arts and, should it appear that she does not have sufficient talent for this, then she wants to go to a domestic science school in which field she will also be of great value to our compatriots.

And what Kartini wants you already know, right? To be trained as a teacher and then later together we will open a school, preferably a boarding school, for the daughters of the nobility. Our idea is to develop fine, intelligent mothers for the future, who will be able to effectively spread education amongst the Javanese people. I certainly don't have to preach a sermon to you about the influence that the woman can exercise in Society, about the great task that nature itself has given her. To be a mother means to be the first educator of mankind. This we will quickly pass over but you know this yourself just as well as we do. But now about the material side: people are making efforts to obtain government support to allow us to study in the Netherlands. And should the government not help, Nellie says then Oost en West will. Unasked that organization has already offered us its support. Now Nellie has introduced us to their circle of friends and Oost en West has repeated its offer for assistance.

Your mother was very happy when she read Nellie's spirited letter in *Oost en West*.[241] Her happiness and gratitude was very moving. She was ill but she still had to tell us of her joy. She sent us a postcard written in pencil from her bed. My eyes filled with tears when I read her dear handwriting. There is much sorrow in this world, yes, there is much suffering, but as well there is much, very much that gives joy.

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241 See above, Nellie van Kol's article 'De Javaansche Vrouw'.

18 Aug

Now I am going to talk to you some more and the letter has to go off otherwise it will become so old and it is already too long. Perhaps I am thoroughly boring you with it. Be honest, please! Honesty must be the basis of our friendship. Never be afraid to tell me something. Even if it may hurt me, if you think it will be beneficial for me. Will you do that, brother? I will appreciate that all the more. We don't and couldn't expect anything else from you that you could not and would never permit that the workers under your command were beaten.[242]

We share your feelings and opinions in this regard completely. I myself could never hit a living thing. It causes so much pain to see the animal in a person, unchained, untamed, to see a human being lowered to the condition of an animal. We can't understand at all that there could be people – yes, even women – who could watch a punishment being meted out. We think it is low, heartless – you know that prisoners in a chain gang are beaten with rattan as punishment – heartless, those people who are prepared to lend themselves to execute such punishments. I think it is base of a Javanese, and no less of a European, if he lowers himself to do such a thing. I have seen a European, by no means stupid and indeed quite educated – at a celebration of the people – beat a child and after that a woman and young girl because these poor creatures didn't get out of that important gentleman's way soon enough. I clenched my teeth in order not to make a sound; each stroke of the rattan cut me to the quick. Oh it was so painful! It is not the gruesomeness that makes me shudder at the thought of physical punishment but the deep humiliation that it involves both for the one being punished and the one who is delivering the punishment. Such punishment merely embitters but does not improve in my opinion.

As children in a society in which the principle is ingrained that a Raden Mas or Raden Ajeng etc is absolutely a being of a higher order who is entitled to expect, has a right to be revered as a god by the people, I have seen more scenes than I care to that have made me tremble with indignation. At such time we hold ourselves completely still, unable either to speak or laugh: indignation and sympathy stifle our mouth. An acquaintance of ours once understood this and said: 'We have to do this, how else would we few be able to maintain peace

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242 Van Kol noted in his account of the Ombilin coal mine where EC Abenandon was employed as a geologist that the majority of work was done by forced labour: in 1900 585,000 of the 820,000 employees were prisoners. Desertion, mortality from disease, as well as murder were widespread.

and quiet amongst the thousands and thousands? They would have chased us away long ago, into the sea, had they not this fear of us.'[243]

Obedient out of fear! When will it be that that the divine command named Love, will penetrate the millions and millions of hearts. For one thousand nine hundred and two years the principle of love has been preached; how many hundreds of thousands of years must pass before Love becomes the possession, not just of extraordinary hearts, but of those of the majority?

Your mother knows all about our lives: has she ever told you about our childhood, when we suffered under the despotic rule of our older brothers and sister?

Amongst us it is the rule: younger people must obey older ones in everything. That was not something that your sister Kartini could abide; in whom the desire for freedom had awakened quite early. The consequence was that I was constantly at odds with my parents and older brothers and sister because I chose not to do what they wanted except when the justice of it was apparent to me.

There I was, a child of 12, alone against the might of the enemy. Then also God had not deserted me. He helped me through this difficult time. We children cried bitter, bitter tears. You know who was always our friend, always our helper and supporter? Kartono. But he was usually not at home but in Semarang. So our friendship goes back many years, dating from my early childhood. My oldest sister married, my oldest brother left home and from then on we began a new life here. The motto was: 'liberty, equality, sisterhood'![244] We want to be liked, loved, and not feared.

It is not that I want to show off but everything suggests that the little ones prefer to stay and be with us than with the others. With us there is order, harmony and no fear. Love is what binds us, that keeps us together. How much love we have received from our little ones! They have taught us a lot. But those who made our childhood years so unbearable were also our teachers. They taught us what we should do: that is, not be like them. This is another indication that suffering has a role to play.

Those who had previously criticized us so severely now come to us in love and friendship. They don't say it in so many words but their deeds show it. In every letter our sister-in-law asks us to come and stay: for us to stay with her will be good for her and her household, she has often said.

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243 This may be hyperbole although there was growing popular criticism of the Javanese aristocracy's collaboration with the colonial regime.

244 This modified rendition of the French revolutionary slogan was borrowed from Dutch feminist literature.

God is great. God is mighty![245]

Could that small slice of life, our history, not become part of a biographical history of two peoples – the Dutch and the Javanese? Might it be possible that one day, mutual respect and love may unite Java and the Netherlands?[246] How we have been able to come to this wonderful conclusion I really don't know. We have been asked it many times. We only know that we can love, and love deeply. And this is the entire secret I believe.

And now, your question regarding the woodcarver. I told you already somewhere that at the moment he has a very large order from Oost en West and besides that one from the G.G. Do you have patience, you will need it. I don't have to tell you, do I, that I will be happy to take care of your order? But please give me your requirements soon because orders are coming from all directions, if you aren't quick, then others will be before you. But sister will, of course, keep a place open for her brother but please don't wait too long. Just recently we sent off a divinely beautiful bookcase. It is a present from the O family for sister. The design, the construction, demand admiration and respect. It is truly superb.

Now, brother dear, I sincerely hope that this long conversation will not scare you off from further correspondence with your sisters but that you see it as evidence and confirmation of our sincerity when we say that we regard you completely as our brother and friend. Sister Roekmini will also write to you. We heartily hope that more letters from Sawah Lunto[247] directed to Jepara are to follow. Tell us everything, your work, your life, your surroundings.

It is a pity that photography is such an expensive hobby otherwise we would love to get involved with it to take photos of typical, really Javanese things. We children of this land can get access to anywhere; where you people cannot come we can.

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245 This exclamation repeats the Islamic declaration of faith.

246 This sentiment encapsulated the emerging ideal of 'association' proposed by some colonial reformers and Western educated Javanese. It was most clearly formulated publicly by Snouck Hurgronje who advocated the expansion of Western education for indigenous leaders.

247 Sawah Lunto was the town near the Ombilin coal mine in West Sumatra.

To Nellie van Kol

20 August 1902

Highly esteemed Mevrouw

We had people over from Batavia who love Javanese art with all their heart and are prepared to do whatever they can for it. They were members of the organizing committee of Oost en West in the Indies who around Sinterklaas time would like to have their shopfront filled with objects of Native arts and crafts and would very much like the products from Jepara to be well represented. Preparation for this that we gladly took upon us meant that I was unable before now to take up my conversation with our friend in Prinsenhage. Your husband will tell you later what a fine standard the wood-carving and textile craft has reached here. For us it is such a joy to be able to collaborate on making the artistic work of our people better known. Oh, we so love to admire and we are so proud of our so little regarded and so often misjudged people.

We regard it as a great privilege to be able to be the intermediaries through whose hands some of the spiritual expressions of our people will find their way in a new world; works of art which command admiration and respect for the abilities of their simple creators, the so often disparaged Javanese.

When one regards these beautiful objects and next to them their very simple maker and the extremely primitive tools with which he works, then one almost gets a feeling of deep respect and admiration for his art, a real conviction that one is here dealing with a real artist. Once when we were ecstatic about his work we asked him: 'Hey, fellow, where do you get all that beauty from?' Briefly the downcast eyes were raised to our face and a timid laugh played on his mouth and he simply answered: 'From my heart, bendoro!'

We were full of admiration but at the same time we were so annoyed at ourselves that we were standing there on the footpath while he was sitting assuming a meek position, making himself small before us even though he was a hundred times our superior. Why? Why? Because we happened to be the children of a father to whom power and position had been granted. Oh what rubbish!

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It is wonderful that because of your tireless work and that of several others, the eyes of Greater Netherlands are slowly beginning to open for that important element in a child's education: children's literature.

The Netherlands is fortunate in being able to pride itself in knowing it has people with such wonderful ability who with heart and soul have committed themselves to the formation of the hearts and minds of the youth in the Netherlands. In this respect the Dutch child is advantaged over that of the Javanese who possess not a single book other than the schoolbooks that the children who go to school have. There is a man here who can and will do much for the education of Native children who once expressed an interest in doing something in this regard but that was years ago and we haven't heard anything more about that.

When we were still children the inspector for Native Education asked us to write some little stories describing the lives of Native children which would be illustrated and published in the style of picture books. We had not the slightest idea when we were writing these that one day the pioneer of this noble movement in the Netherlands to give its youth educational reading material[248] would ask us to make a small contribution towards building a tall, slender tower, rising high into the air, a tower with many windows, looking out to all corners of the earth – which she was building for those she loved. We pray to God that we will be able to provide the contribution that we have been asked for.

We are still busy collecting fairy tales, myths, games and songs for this purpose. However it won't be easy I think to put the tunes that accompany the games and fairy tales to paper. In the first place, although we are big music lovers, we deeply regret that we have never had the opportunity to be taught music. But that is not a real problem; that can be overcome. The biggest problem is that we have an entirely different musical scale than you in which there are some sounds that cannot be found in European music.

Last week we spoke with a European[249] who has been gathering Native artistic work in all its various forms for the last 20 years, including pantuns. He now wanted some Javanese songs, gamelan music, to add to his collection and till now he has not succeeded in setting a system of notation because of that difficulty.[250] But, then, gamelan music is extremely difficult whereas by contrast, children's songs that accompany games and fables are very simple. We tried a few on the piano and it worked pretty well – but all in sharps and flats.

It would seem that there is an invisible telephone line between Lali Djiwa and here, that is being extremely heavily used by us.[251] Otherwise we cannot

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248 This is an oblique reference to Nellie herself.

249 This is probably a reference to Mr Zimmerman mentioned in Kartini's letter to EC Abendanon, 15 August 1902.

250 A system of notation was being developed at the end of the nineteenth century.

251 This reference to an imaginary telephone is characteristic of Kartini's interest in modern technology and the future she is envisaging in which she situates an autonomous Java.

understand how many of the points you mention in your letter were being thought and spoken about, and even written down by us at almost the same time as you were writing them. In my letter that crossed yours you will find that many of the questions you asked have been answered. Even that idea of including the tunes along with the games and fables we had discussed before we received your letter. We think it would be such a shame if these weren't included because it is the tunes that give the games and fables their charm. As children we didn't like it if during the telling of a story our storyteller did not also sing the songs that were part of them.

Recently we conducted a heated debate about the influence of books. Our opponent thought it was all nonsense: ideals, poetry, were plain idiocy, books – worthless, of not the least use. We were so moved when, the very next day, we opened *De Amsterdammer*[252] and read your wonderful article on the influence of books. We are merely amateurs, of no consequence, but there we have an authority speaking. It is a rather strange individual and for that reason it was interesting for us to observe him closely and draw our conclusions: it is a person with many good qualities but very weak. Because of him we can see more clearly what in particular needs to be developed in a child: willpower. Without this all other good characteristics will be of little value.

Oh, I can't tell you how thankful we are to you that you have shown us the way to real happiness, to real freedom, to God. He who serves God truly is free; he is not in the power of people. To depend on people is to allow oneself to be imprisoned by people. What you have shown us is so wonderful, it is something so important. It is true happiness isn't it? It is not far away but, oh, so difficult to reach. One can't get there by tram or train, or by boat and no gold can get us there. The travel cost is bitterly expensive: it is tears, blood from the heart and meditation. Where is it located? In ourselves. Much can be found in this world that will bring us joy, that can move us, that makes us think, yes, this is it, the happiness we have long searched for! But every time one comes to that conclusion one will come to realize, often in sorrow, that what one thought was happiness was merely a mirage.

True happiness that lasts and lives within us is peace within one's soul. I have now felt this for some time: you have taught me to say it.

It is said that God is jealous. He does not allow one to worship other gods than Him, and therefore punishes in bitter disappointment the person who creates his own gods and worships them. But we think: 'Thou shalt have no

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252 An Amsterdam-based Dutch cultural affairs weekly founded in 1877 which was the organ of progressive liberal and cultural politics including colonial reform.

other gods before me', a beautiful command. Doesn't this contain a warning that is at the same time both serious and humane? A person is only a human being – a fallible creature…

Ah, if only it were better understood, mankind would have been spared so much bitter suffering.

It may be that we had been prepared by numerous circumstances, but this does not take away from the fact that it was you who lit the light within our soul. Recently we experienced something unpleasant that would certainly have made us feel desperate. But now, while it did severely disturb us, it did so only briefly, then we regained our composure once more, and we were calm and peaceful again. We held His hand firmly, maintained our gaze upon His face. And the darkness became light, the storm became a breeze.[253] There is a Father who sees us, knows us and judges us lovingly.

Moeder is so happy with the change in us. She would love to meet you, to thank you personally for the wonder that you have performed in her children: to have opened our hearts to the Father of Love!

What had turned us into unbelievers? It was the many things that we had observed that went under the name of Religion. Oh, what is one to make of a pious head priest who preaches against the payment of interest who enriches himself at the expense of the poverty of his fellow man, he who should lead the way to the good, and preach the good? Oh, the intolerance of so many of those who are strictly religious… We were children – how far could the thoughts of a child extend? We could not know, understand, that it was people who did the bad things, misusing the name of God to cover their wicked practices. We could not know that originally, everything was beautiful, but that it was people who made what was beautiful, ugly.

As children we learned to read the Koran, learned to say prayers and proverbs which we did not know the meaning of, and probably our religious teachers didn't know either, since it was in Arabic. We fasted, were hungry, we did everything that was asked of us. Then there came a time that we began to ask ourselves why, what for, for what purpose? These questions, at first voiced quietly gradually grew louder within us. And we said it aloud: We want to know, we asked the meaning of these prayers and proverbs that we had to learn and recite. We sinned – the Book was too holy to be understood by sinful people. People became desperate, we wanted to know and no one could tell us. And then we didn't want to do it any more. What we once did without giving

[253] This repeats the verse quoted to EC Abendanon earlier. Here the key word used is 'donker' (darkness) rather than 'nacht' (night).

it a thought along with everyone else, we could not do if we thought about it. We didn't want to learn to read the Book that was written in a language incomprehensible to us. We no longer wanted to fast. We didn't want to do anything, to the great sorrow of Moeder who was raised as a strict believer. Heaven and earth be our witness, if we did something wrong it was our conscience that troubled us, if we did good then we felt a sense of satisfaction – that is still the case. Sin was, and still is, for us – causing pain to others.[254]

We asked and asked again not – what is your belief? – but how do you live?

Our God was the Good, this is what we had constantly tried to serve. Now we know that the Good and God are one and the same!

We are at the moment reading a beautiful poem in flower language – the word for 'poem' does not exist in our language so we say 'flower language'. Isn't that appropriate?

Can you remember the cool, clear, tropical evenings, when everything is at peace when the quiet is disturbed by nothing but the rustle of the wind in the palm trees, the fresh evening breeze bringing you the soft, sweet perfume of kemuning, cempaka and melati? Wasn't there a time when a dreamy melody permeated your consciousness?[255] The song of a Javanese who sings for his family and neighbours of love, heroic deeds, sumptuous splendour, wise and omnipotent men and women, princes and princesses from long, long ago? All our books are written in poetic form and to read is to sing the lines.

This is the loveliest hour – when the Javanese, tired after the day's work is done, seeks repose in song, dreaming away all his problems, totally given over to that splendid far-away past about which he sings, and to which his song transports his soul. 'The Javanese people are a people of memories' a young friend of ours has said quite correctly. 'All is beautiful in the deep dream of its eternal sleep.' That's very true, but we are alive and we must live, it has been so often made clear to us, and we must go forward!

That is also what our friend says: 'We must awaken your people to become a productive people who can energetically express themselves.'

Much that is lovely will thereby no doubt be pushed into the background but should we therefore prevent ourselves from waking up? Dreaming <u>is</u> wonderful, dreaming is beautiful, but of what use is it if they only <u>remain</u> dreams. They must be made more beautiful, more wonderful by attempting to turn them into reality.

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254 This paragraph was deleted for the 1911 publication as Abendanon presumably considered it too sensitive. See also Kartini's letter to Nicolaus Adriani, 24 September 1902 below.

255 Nellie lived in Java between 1875 and 1888.

There is so much that is beautiful in Javanese people! Because of you, we have recently heard much that is beautiful from the mouths of the people. The collection of fables puts us into contact with all kinds of people and it is such a great pleasure for us to listen to their ideas. In simple but such gracious language the most beautiful thoughts are expressed which are so moving because of the truth and wisdom they contain. Oh, the more we penetrate the soul of our people, the more we come to love it, and the more superior we think it is. A people that is so poetical by nature as the Javanese cannot be standing on a low rung in terms of spiritual development. Everything that is beautiful in this life: love, belief, art, everything that uplifts and ennobles, is poetry. And the Javanese people and poetry are so closely intertwined. What, how should we think about a child that comes to beg from an old woman, for 'A flower that perfumes one's heart.' You should hear it in the original language, it is so sweet, so gracious:

'Nyuwun sekar melati
Sinkang sekar hing punjring ati.'[256]

I would love to send you some of these beautiful thoughts in the gracious and melodious language in which they were spoken; translated they are no longer what they were. We will also come to beg from you like that little fellow, for 'flowers that give off perfume in the heart'.

We can tell you a lot about our people, can't we? What a silly question; it is surely obvious that you love to hear about that, both of you, who both love our people so heartily. It is that love that we to thank for what is beautiful in our lives. Like you, we believe that what is <u>essential</u> is in the <u>spiritual</u>, not in the physical world.

We feel so rich in the intellectual friends that we have. Is it selfish that we want to learn from everyone? And prefer to correspond with people who feed and broaden our intellectual lives? Oh, it is so repulsive to receive non-committal letters and to have to answer them, letters that force us to ask 'why were they written?' We are truly privileged to have a connection with a number of superior minds.

Deep in the heart of Celebes there is a friend of ours, a man <u>noble</u> of heart and mind. Oh, we admire him so much for the noble work he is undertaking there. It is always a time of celebration for us when we receive letters from Dr Adriani, they are as interesting as they are educational. It was such a pleasure for us to meet him at the home of the Abendanon family. Mevrouw Abendanon had brought us together knowing how much this acquaintance would mean for

[256] This essentially repeats what she had written to EC Abendanon five days earlier.

us. Thinking of him and his work is always a comfort to us when we see or hear about so much uncharitableness and egotism here. The most painful thing for us is the selfishness of people, which often knows no bounds.

Oh it is so good to be here – in the midst of cold, lukewarm, indifferent people, many with neither heart nor mind – to now and then meet individuals so full of love, passion and heroism! Praise be to God that we know such people both from afar and close by.

* * * *

What a pity you did not know us in the prime of our time as a threesome. You would certainly have enjoyed it. Three parallel souls living side by side as sisters. Storms passed over their young heads, storms raged in their hearts. I think of you: '<u>to reach their goal one must give up many an illusion</u>.'

Arising from the death of spring blossom many a fruit ripens; it's the same in human lives isn't it? Out of the death of young dreams sometimes other, richer ideas may emerge which may produce fruit…

We have set aside an important dream of ours. In that bitter, terrible hour when we buried it with tears of blood we felt arising in us like a current, a new fresh strong life! We know it and we feel it; many, many more tears and blood from the heart must flow to nourish that fruit and bring it to maturity. I believe that we will again have to divest ourselves of a dream for the sake of the good cause.[257]

A <u>great deal of patience</u>! We are now beginning to understand what Mr Abendanon meant when we had his wife tell us that.[258] Much of what was once just words now gains <u>meaning</u>. Yes we can and must only move slowly: the journey is so far and so long, and the road so steep and difficult! To suffer oneself is not so bad, but to hold back the achievement of what we are aiming at, that would be <u>terrible</u>.

I am thinking of a particular evening in the recent past. An acquaintance of ours took us both to a concert at the theatre in Semarang.[259] It was the first time in our entire lives that we, without my sister, without father, without Moeder, found ourselves surrounded by such a sea of people. The two of us, completely alone amongst all these strange faces. And all of a sudden we thought: 'That is

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257 In retrospect this appears to be a prophetic exclamation.

258 This provides some insight as to how Rosa Abendanon acted as a conduit for both Jacques Abendanon and Kartini to convey communicate their respective views.

259 This may have been a performance by the sensational Bangsawan Indra Zanibar theatrical company that performed a much publicized 'komedi' in Semarang on 3 August in the Semarang schouwburg.

what our life will be like in the future! The two of us, alone in the sea of life. Yet we are not concerned: there is a God who watches over us!

On the 20th of this month we travelled in thought to Tanjong Priok. We saw there the Willem II steam away from Java's coast carrying with it a priceless cargo: Java's great friend and passionate defender headed to the distant Netherlands where, in the country's parliament as a result of his noble work and passion, he will be able to speak with even more authority and strength in support of the interests of the millions of children of these lands.[260] Bring him across safely, Willem II, for the sake of the lands and for his dear family.

There was gratitude and there was melancholy, there was hope in my heart but above all – a feeling of great tenderness. Love for people, love of justice … these are not just idle words, no pale chimeras…

We believe in Love!

And now dearest, faithful, purist adviser, our highly respected and dearly loved friend, we thank you with a warm handshake for your letter which in all respects has done us so much good. It caused us to think deeply, strengthened us, and opened up for us again new perspectives.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

24 August 1902

Hello dearest, how are you? Have you now completely recovered? Is Mijnheer in good health?

The week before last we had Heer van Lawick van Pabst over, who told us how very poorly you had been. I was so glad that we had received your letter, written a while after the departure of the person just mentioned from Batavia, in which you told us that you had returned to health. And we heartily hope that you receive this 'glowing with good health' and in good spirits.

Now I am going to discuss 'business' with you.[261] Do you remember that I once wrote to you about beautiful fire screens for Europe and whether you would not like to have one such as this made and that you wrote back in June saying that you would like one and that I should arrange this for you? I have done so and this piece of handicraft is now ready.

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260 The reference is to Henri van Kol.

261 This letter reveals the significance of the emerging 'business' of woodcraft that Kartini was instrumental in developing in association with the Oost en West organization in the Netherlands and its European supporters in Java. This growing European interest in 'native craft' accompanied but was not necessarily supportive of colonial reform.

But now I am afraid that one of us has misunderstood: because I heard from Annie that you would very much like a screen for your door and would give me its measurements; it would be heavily carved and not à jour. The fire screen has been carved in à jour style, which is in fact what I had written to you on a previous occasion. Measured from the ground it stands 98 cm with a width of 60 cm, made of jati wood and in a sono wood frame and standing on little sono wood legs – and at the top some decorative work in sono wood. The screen itself is decorated with 2 wayang, standing on snakes and surrounded by leaves, vines and birds, and carved in à jour style. The screen had been ordered well before Annie went to Batavia. The letter with your request arrived here before her departure. Now I have to ask you what the situation really is. You do not have to take the fire screen if you prefer not to; in this case you certainly would not embarrass us – we already have a solution for it.

When recently Heer Zimmerman from Batavia was here, I showed him, amongst other things, the unfinished screen and he immediately asked if it had been ordered, he would also very much like to have such a screen. Yes it had been ordered, but should it not eventuate, then I would let Oost en West dispose of it and Heer Zimmerman thought this a good idea.

So, dearest, there is no need to lose any sleep over this – if you would rather not have the fire screen, then do not take it, it will be all right. And, on seeing it in Batavia, should it not suit your taste, then you know to whom you can off-hand it and who would very much like to take it over from you. Its cost is *f*40.

I still have money of yours here:

from 1901	*f*0.60
from this year	*f*6.70
	*f*7.30

Would you be so very kind as to tell me with just a single-word postcard, what your decision is. Simply a yes or a no will be enough. I would like to know as soon as possible in order to arrange the order for Oost en West accordingly. You know, naturally, that that Society has placed orders worth *f*250. We have had all kinds of things made.

It is wonderful for our craftsmen – there are now twelve of them working. I hope very much that the objects they are now in the process of making will turn out particularly beautiful, will meet our expectations and yes, as has happened many times, will surpass them.

Has Mev. de Bruijn already been to see you to show you her box – she wrote to me to say she would do so. What did you think of it?

Woodwork, goldsmithing and textile work here are embarking on a beautiful future. Oh! I am so very pleased about it. Heer Zimmerman bought a few pieces of weaving from here and when we showed him a small sirih box made of tortoise shell he immediately wanted one. It is so nice that it is completely produced in Jepara – the tortoise comes from Karimun-Jawa,[262] it was prepared here by Jepara goldsmiths, who also decorated it with gold chased work. Heer Z. would very much like one, but made up in silver; the gold decorated box is so expensive.

You already know that Edie has presented his sisters with a wonderful collection of books. For this he had sought our assistance to order a bookcase which he very much wanted decorated with woodcarving. Naturally the sisters would want that. What a question. We hope that he will get just as fine a piece as little sister has. But that gentleman will have to exercise some patience – that is our condition.

It was such a pity that little sister's bookcase had just been sent off when the gentlemen from Batavia came, otherwise they could have been nothing but ecstatic! It is truly on a grand scale, it commands deep respect and awe for the abilities of the simple Javanese craftsman. If one contemplates the wonderful work and next to it its simple creator and the extremely primitive implements with which he crafted this beautiful object, then you feel a sense of deep admiration for his talent, the deep conviction that one is dealing with a true craftsman.

Once, when we stood enraptured by his craft, we asked him: 'Hey fellow, where do you get this beauty from?' For a moment the downcast eyes were focused on us, a shy smile played around his mouth and he answered simply: 'From my heart, Bendoro'. And I became annoyed with myself that I had a higher social position than he – I on the stair – and he before us on the ground, in a humble position, making himself insignificant because … we happen to be the children of a father to whom power and prestige had been granted![263]

What right did we have to accept that token of respect from someone whom we regarded as a hundred times our superior? I hated myself.

And this is how a member of the 'aristocrat brood' thinks; no wonder that it is coming to bed down with the social democrats!

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262 An island off the coast from Jepara.

263 Kartini often repeats episodes or what she may have considered particularly apposite descriptions in letters to different correspondents, as is the case here.

Little Sister has been declared totally fit by the doctor, she has returned to Pemalang and will shortly go to stay in a cooler region.[264] All of us here are well. Anne sends you her kindest regards. That child has certainly experienced much with us and has frequently had to experience many pinpricks that were in reality intended for us. Everywhere she goes she is asked about us and then she has to swallow the hateful comments about us.

I think it is so cowardly of those people. Why do they say nothing when they have the opportunity to speak to us personally? Do they perhaps feel intuitively that it will have no effect on us? We are determined not to pay any attention to it, or to become angry about it.

In this way, recently Anneke had to spend an entire evening, where we were present, acting as a lightning conductor. Poor child, she had to listen and put up with so much, even though most of it was intended for us. We think of that evening with great melancholy because it certainly is sad to feel only the deepest pity where once there was only unqualified respect.

There was someone on that occasion who asked what I had requested of Heer Van Kol and what he had promised me. I excused myself and said I would leave the answer to the fullness of time. We think it a waste of words to argue with someone who only asks out of curiosity, or, of whom we know, that we would never be able to agree. Someone else said to me that I 'had "played up" to the old man and had just spun him a story'. There are those who say we are merely doing it as a dare, in order to attract attention, to show off, etc.

Really nice to hear all these opinions! It is beginning to become really merry!

Someone, unknown to us, absolutely wanted to turn us into Theosophists, is prepared to enlighten us on all possible areas of difficulty in that science, sent us information about it. Another stranger announced that we, unknown to ourselves, were already Theosophists.[265]

I know very well that we are now in an extremely dangerous period and that 'caution' must be our watchword.

Together with this I am sending you an article by Stella, in response to that 'remarkable piece by Mr Moreu' that I sent you last. The authoress is, I

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264 Little Sister refers to Kardinah, earlier referred to as Kleintje or Little One. She was the youngest of the trio.

265 Theosophy had become important as a philosophical platform where Western educated 'progressive' Javanese intellectuals and colonial progressives with an interest in orientalist perspectives could share ideas on the question of 'association'. Because Kartini echoed many of the ideas expressed by such colonials in regard to religion, Javanese culture and 'association', it was quite reasonable to have assumed that she also adhered to Theosophy.

understand, a teacher in Semarang, a very intelligent person.[266] You do not have to return it nor the edition of *De Echo* in which you will find some well intentioned, but very defective, rhymes.[267]

Just now I received your letter, thank you, hearty thanks for it, dearest. Also thank Mijnheer from us both. Wonderful that Heer v. K. has been to visit you. I thank you my dear with a heartfelt kiss on both cheeks for everything.

There is someone in Holl. who has asked us for our permission to arrange this and that on our behalf. I have not yet given an answer![268]

Goodbye dear one! – I must end, in a moment we have to make a social call – fun eh, 2 hours sitting in the coach there and two hours back! But we are prepared to do it, they are such terribly dear people. Give Mijnheer our kindest regards from us both and you are embraced by your R and your own

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

2 September 1902

Dearest, we both want to thank you most sincerely for the transfer of Anneke to one of the most beautiful, if not the best place in the Indies – we hope very much that Buitenzorg will offer a little of its name to our young friend. Her wish has been fulfilled, she has been transferred and has got Buitenzorg, may the fulfilment of her heart's desire really bring her luck. One joy she already has: the right to now and then visit you! For that we are very glad and thankful, for her sake, it will be good for her in many ways, to visit you and talk to you.[269]

The decision arrived on the 31st. We brought it to her in her room, in bed. A wonderful awakening! We are thrilled for her. And Anneke herself? – the poor child was so nervous – yesterday and the day before she actually did nothing else but continually burst into tears. Poor little one! We can readily put ourselves in her position, besides the feeling of joy, gratitude, relief, there

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266 It has not been possible to identify this reference.

267 It appears that this refers to the poem by Kartini included as an appendix in Allard (1976).

268 Again at the very end of her letter Kartini inserts a reminder about her intention to go to the Netherlands.

269 Abendanon had evidently arranged a 'plum position' for Annie Glaser in the highlands of Buitenzorg, present day Bogor, which was the seat of the colonial bureaucracy. This transfer was presumably discussed during Annie's visiting the Abendanons in Batavia. Kartini's account of the difficulties she had experienced was no doubt intended to confirm the importance of the transfer.

is sadness and fear of what is to come! What she has she knows, what will she get now? She is still such a child, and can hardly imagine herself without 'mother'. If the two 'parents' who she has discovered here went with her, then everything would be all right, she says! She certainly would not have thought that when she left for here with some reluctance and trepidation a year ago, and even less when a few years ago she was dancing in the Kurhaus.[270]

Anneke now knows why she came here, in order to learn about the Javanese from another, purer perspective. Your husband who posted her here for us can be very pleased about his work: for both parties it has not been a lost year, both of us gave and received, alternatively we helped bolster each other up. Once again our heartiest thanks for this to you both.

It is cheeky of us to play 'mother' and often to 'children' older than us. But what has age to do with it? Each person needs love, the old as well as the child. Could it really be that a woman can exclusively and only come into her own through marriage, only in this way attain the complete fulfilment of her nature? Because a woman's highest and greatest glory is motherhood? But must a woman then absolutely have children of her own to be 'mother', in the true sense of that word: a being of love and devotion? If that were true, at what a pitiably low level are the standards of the world, that one can only give oneself completely when one loves a part of oneself! How many mothers are there not who are only called 'mother' because they have brought children into the world but who, apart from that, are not worthy of the name 'mother'. A woman, who gives herself to others with all the love that is in her heart, with all the devotion of which she is capable, is in a spiritual sense a 'mother'.

We place the spiritual mother higher than the physical. We hope and pray fervently that, later if it be granted us, our ideal will become reality, that we will have a school where our children will not only call us 'mother' out of politeness, but because they see and feel us to be 'mothers'.

We sincerely hope that Anneke will find kind, hospitable people in Buitenzorg who will help make up somewhat for the absence of a mother and a home of her own for this poor lonely child. Here Anneke has experienced the life of a Javanese. If only you could look behind the door when Anneke is sitting on the ground with us in such a sisterly way. One evening she was sitting with us in our room at the low table at which I am presently sitting, she was sewing and we were writing, and there was a fourth person in the

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[270] This is a reference to Anneke's earlier acquaintance with Abendanon's son in the Netherlands.

room, a friend of ours. She read to us in Javanese fashion. You probably know that all our books are written in poetic metre and – as we say – in flower language – and are read in the manner of a chant. Doors and shutters were open, in front of the room a cepaka tree was in flower and sent us its soft, sweet perfume on a breath of air. Her soft, tender voice was lovely, our ears were caressed by her sweet song that carried us to far-off times, to primeval times filled with splendour and magnificence and wise, beautiful and omnipotent people…

It was wonderful; that dream of the soul…

Dreaming on in this way, we chewed more on our pens than we wrote with them on paper. And in these real Javanese surroundings, between these brown children of the Land of the Sun sat a little white daughter of the West. Oh, how we would love to have you like that in our midst!

We are also learning these songs – and if we are not too shy then we will dream about you in song.

Yesterday, Annie did something typically Javanese with us. She had so much wanted to leave Jepara so we had said to her: 'Ask the assistance of the Sunan of Mantigen,[271] promise him an offering of flowers if your wish comes true'.

She did it. The day before yesterday she was reminded of it and the next morning she went with us to make an offering. Yesterday, with a group of priests we made our way to the holy grave – we brought flowers and incense with us. Anneke entered the building of the holy graves with us and sat with us on the ground at the foot-end of the grave. Incense was burnt and a mystical drone, at first softly, but becoming increasing louder, rose from the group of priests. It was solemn and impressive, all of us sat with bowed heads over which wafted the prayers of the priests and the clouds of blue incense. One of the priests, shuffling across the ground, brought Annie's flowers and reverently laid them on the grave of the Sunan and after that on the other graves. Next to me I heard someone sob – it was Anneke! She had entered the building barefoot, as a token of respect, and we, in our own way, brought greetings and honour to the dead! From there we went to the 'kali' that flows behind the graveyard to wash our feet. We asked the priests to pray for heaven's blessings for Anneke.[272]

Dearest, we would so very much like to do and experience all this with you. There is so much of Javanese life that is disappearing. The touching respect

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271 The reference is to one of the nine Wali, founders of Islam in Java.

272 This episode depicts Kartini's vision of an ideal 'association' not on Western but on Javanese terms.

that we have for our dead, for our parents. Nothing of any significance occurs in our lives happy or sad without us remembering our dead.

Anneke will no doubt think of Jepara from time to time when she is living high and dry in Buitenzorg, even if things should be a thousand times better there than here in Jepara. Those who have once come to know Jepara and its soul will never be able to forget it. One must always think back on it, whether it be with love or with hatred.

Yesterday afternoon we went to the woodcarver's workshop. It was very interesting. There were 16 people – men and youths – at work. Everything was extremely simple but how beautiful was that which was being produced! Sister Roekmini, of course, had to immediately join in the work and very soon was sitting with the woodcarvers at a bench, totally at home, as though she had always been sitting there.

It is now night. This afternoon we received your letter and a postal order for *f*40. My sincere thanks for that. I shall send off the screen as soon as possible. What I still have from you is enough to pay the postage costs. Thank you. Perhaps we will bring the crate to Semarang ourselves when we go there next week.

It pains me that Mev. de Bruijn does not like the box, but one cannot dispute taste.[273] It is also very unfortunate that a split has developed in the wood. Annie can testify that the box was in perfect condition when it was here. And I cannot and must not be held responsible. I cannot be expected to know that the wood might split later. I shall give Anneke Mev. d. B.'s letters to read in which she made the request – she will no doubt pass some details on to you. Why does she now order another box if it does not please her anyway? I replied to her it would be possible only if she was prepared to wait – otherwise not. First come, first served. I have not heard anything further.

It is wonderful for me now that Oost en West has intervened – I can redirect all orders to that Society, according to Heer V. Lawick v. Pabst. Only for you do I want to arrange orders and we are prepared to do this at any time, the rest can go to O. en W. I will certainly pass your request on to Heer Zimmerman but I have heard nothing from him recently. He was going to write to me about 'plangie' and 'dringin', and how much of it he was going to reorder. I shall also ask for you to be shown these things – perhaps you will want some too.

Forgive me, but I do not really understand what you mean by 'old silver'? Would you be so kind as to explain that to me again? Do you mean silver

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273 Mevrouw de Bruijn was evidently a prominent resident of Batavia. It was not possible to locate further information concerning her.

boxes or containers? Write to me again about it. Tortoiseshell combs cannot be obtained here but we can get them for you, we ourselves need to get several as well. We get them from Solo and then have them decorated with gold and silver here by a goldsmith. Be careful dear, we will ruin you!

Wonderful, that little trip to Wijnkoop Bay[274] – go on, why don't you both venture a little further – to – Jepara! It would be too ideal, wouldn't it!

We are in very low spirits about our friends, the Ovinks. They are leaving for good. Poor, poor friends! He has been shamefully mistreated; we have heard some things about it from an enemy of Heer O. who would certainly be more likely to disparage than support him and even he thought it was cruel.[275] Moedertje Mies has not written much about it to us, once on board she will tell us everything. We are still hoping to see her in Semarang. It would be just too terrible if they had to leave here, and forever, without a greeting from us. We hope to go to Semarang on the 9th. Anne is coming with us – she would also like to meet the friends of her parents. Unpleasant days ahead! It is however remarkable. On 5 consecutive Septembers great things have happened in our lives! [276]

'If you come to Holl. then our house is yours' says Moedertje. We know it is meant sincerely but we think it is too terrible to think about. That their suffering should be our happiness.

Goodbye now, dearest! Give Mijnheer and your sister the warmest regards from everyone – also from Annie and for you a warm kiss from sister R and

Your own little girl
K

We are curious who will be sent to Madiun after Heer Voorstad.[277] The O. family will be repatriating on the Willem II.

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274 Wijnkoop Baai, now known as Pelabuhan Bay, is on the south coast of Java.

275 Mr Ovink was passed over for promotion, reputedly as a result of an administrative misdemeanour, and resigned in protest and returned to the Netherlands. The case was widely aired in *De Locomotief*.

276 Perhaps again a prophetic statement: in September 1904 Kartini gave birth to her child and died shortly thereafter.

277 Here Kartini engages in some typical colonial gossip concerning appointments to influential positions, in this case who would be appointed as Resident of Madiun.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Semarang, 11 September 1902

Postcard

Dearest Mevrouw, this morning your fire screen was sent as freight by rail to Batavia. I hope it will arrive safely and transport you with delight. At the moment we are staying at my brother's house in Semarang and we have had a visit here from the Ovink family![278] A chance to see each other again after a long separation, and a farewell for life, perhaps! You can imagine our state of mind! And, a few days ago we kissed Annie goodbye perhaps also for the last time! There will probably be no chance of falling asleep tonight, my heart is too full and my head – oh! I sometimes wish I could tell my mind to be silent.

Goodbye dear! Give everyone regards from us all and for you a kiss from your

K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Semarang, 12 September 1902

Dearest, this morning we accompanied our friends, the O. family, on board. Last night could not be the farewell, we had to see them once more for the last time! We are so grateful that we could still be together with our friends a little longer. We have asked them to give you personally both our regards, and Moedertje will do this gladly! Wonderful! We hope that nothing will intervene, that they will be able to visit you and that you will be able to receive them. It is a dream of ours that our best friends should meet each other. We are now calmer in our grief, but we feel it so much the more. We are also calm in our joy! It is as though we have lived through an entire lifetime. We hope that your making each other's acquaintance will be a pleasure for you both! Will you write to us about it? Greet Moedertje warmly from us – and also her husband! We have met Heer Rooijaards,[279] who was very nice to us – invited us to hear him give a reading of Julius Caesar in a week's time – kind, don't you think? And he had only known us for a few minutes. We hope to be able to take up his invitation.

Goodbye, all our love and a kiss from your

K.

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278 One of Kartini's brothers was the jaksa of Semarang. Presumably this was where Kartini stayed on her many trips to the city.

279 Willem Rooijaards, a well-known actor, was currently on tour in Java. His performances were widely reported in *De Locomotief.*

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

15 September 1902

Dearest! Since Saturday evening we are once again safely within the kabupaten walls in our own Jepara, full of gratitude for the wonderful moments we experienced in Semarang. A 1000 fears had tormented us wondering whether that lovely but painful meeting would slip from our grasp! But Heaven smiled on us, and granted us this happiness! We are so very grateful that for one more time we could press Moedertje to our heart, could read in her eyes her love for us. We were so moved to see that dear person again! We had so much to say to each other, but we could say very little, we just looked at each other with our hearts filled with worlds of treasures and worlds of grief!

They had been put up at the residency house but they came to visit us at our brother's house where we were staying; we could not bear to see them again in a strange environment! Father had not been able to come with us for which reason we were not, at first, able to come on board with them; but when we parted that evening it was so difficult. No, as long as she was still within our reach we could not leave go of them; we ourselves had to take them to the Willem II which would take them away from us! Oh, if only we could weep, could cry, what good it would do us, what relief. But since those terrible December days we have not been able to weep again, now we can only suffer in silence, and sometimes that is unbearable.

Our friend has been shamefully treated, and shamefully maligned. In Semarang they heard the rumour that was circulating there before the auction: 'their servants had smeared their furniture with filth.' That I suppose was the reason why they had such a successful auction and that everyone was so very kind to them.[280] The Native civil servants, instead of rejoicing in his fall from grace had given them a send-off, and the servants, who were still the ones from here, wanted to accompany them at any cost – one even came as far as Semarang. We heard little or nothing about the business from them personally but at the residency house we again heard what had transpired. We took no part in the conversation that was being conducted by strangers, we were merely bystanders. Numerous anonymous letters – three-quarters of them not worth looking at – had been sent to the department about our friend, Moedertje told us, and were being investigated totally without reference to the accused! And, in the first instance, in consultation with his enemies. And, again

[280] It was usual for relocating or returning colonials to hold an auction rather than to have household goods transported. Often this would also be a way to contribute financially to the relocation, and as a token of recognition or sympathy, pay more than the nominal value of an item. Hence the term 'Dutch auction.'

completely without reference to him, a report about him has been lodged with the government! What do you think of such actions! To accuse and prejudge someone without giving him the opportunity to reply to that with which he has been charged.

He is a good official, even his enemies have to acknowledge that and what is he like as a person? As a friend we certainly cannot judge impartially but we believe that even his enemies have to admit that he is an honest, upright and righteous person, incapable of any dishonest action. He is critical – and that has provided him with enemies, also because he does not cringe and flatter. He is someone who dares. Poor, poor friend! He loves sincerity, perhaps sometimes to excess, which is what led to his misfortune. But we appreciate this character trait of his fully. It is often not pleasant to hear the truth but we prefer this a thousand times rather than the practice of being nice to one's face and criticizing one behind one's back, as so very many people do.[281]

Father worked with him pleasantly for very many years. If we did something wrong then he would tell us straight out. He did not sweet-talk us and if he did so on an odd occasion then we knew it was meant honestly. He taught us to detest compliments, he never flattered us … we thought that was wonderful. We knew that he loved us and respected us. When men make us a compliment, what do they actually want to tell us other than that they hold us in low esteem – because they have such a 'high regard' for us that they think they can win us over by some cowardly flattery. Only from a few people do we like to hear something nice. This we learned from our friend though he himself did not realize this. Did they come and visit you? We think it would have been wonderful if in fact they had been able to do so.

How to describe to you with what emotions we watched the *Charlotte* sail to the Willem II![282] We watched them with a smile on our lips but with tears in our heart. There they go, part of our heart, part of our soul! Moedertje has gone, our friend has gone … we have no one here now but you … Will you now be our Moedertje, love us even more?

Dearest, dearest, I wished that I could fly into your arms, to nestle into your heart, to hear how warmly that was beating for us! – Continue to love us and trust us! Dearest, dearest is there then no chance at all that we will

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281 Dismissal of a senior colonial official was undoubtedly a scandal that reverberated throughout the small European settler community. The precise basis of the action is not known but ironically Ovink may well have been a victim of attempts to reform the colonial civil service.

282 Overseas passenger ships had to anchor out to sea because of the shallow nature of Semarang harbour and were reached by steam tender, the *Charlotte*.

see each other again in this life? We cannot and will not believe that that could be.

Heer Rooijaards, who was also staying with the Resident, saw our friends off. We recognized him immediately from photographs we had seen of him. We gained a very nice impression of him and he was very friendly towards us. He said straight-out he was unable to come to Jepara but he would like it if we could come to a performance and he invited us to come and hear him in *Julius Caesar* the following Saturday, which we should certainly like to. He would send the invitation to our brother – if we could not take advantage of it then it would not matter. Nice of him, don't you think? He hopes to meet us again in Holland – as do we. We are very grateful to have met him and while we will not have the privilege to hear him, we are happy enough to have been able to meet him personally. We had never expected it.

Rarely have we experienced a week so rich in emotions and of such varying kinds as the preceding one. It began with an event in the lives of friends that may exercise a great influence on their future. We had been given information and on that basis we did something, an act of friendship, which brought Father's disfavour upon us. I can still see myself sitting before Father, looking him straight in the eye, conscious of no ill deed. Father looked sombre and his voice sounded sad: 'Nil, did I deserve this from you? – I trusted you! You have never really hurt me but now you have. I have never been seriously angry with you but now I am really sakit ati! Whatever you have done, I have never been angry with you, but this really hurts me.'[283]

I said nothing, not a word, and I did not cast my eyes down, convinced as I was that I had not committed any bad deed. I was sad that Father was so affected by this matter, but besides that, wonderfully happy with his assurance that I had never really inflicted pain on him and he had never really been angry with me before. I was convinced that time would make Father think differently about what was supposedly my wickedness! We had done nothing that we would not dare tell you about – we had remained silent about it to our parents because it was the secret of others, and not because we were afraid. We cannot always think firstly of ourselves, and that is what they want. We are allowed to help others as long as we ourselves do not run any risk. This may be very sensible, but it does not at all accord with our idea, which declares death to all egotism. And it is a great sorrow to us that we cannot make this high principle clear to the people around us. We are still searching for the word selfishness in our language – wonderful language,

[283] It is not clear what 'crime' she may have committed.

where that word does not exist, if only it was so in real life! – unfortunately everything turns on the pivot of 'I'. Do good when you yourself have enough, help, when it will not create any difficulties for yourself. We cannot go along with that. We cannot simply leave it with words, we have to preach with deeds, with example!

Sooner than we had expected Father came to a different view. On the evening of that day which had begun so tragically I had an inspiration; when being asked for advice it had not entered my head that it could have been of any benefit to me as well. I had only thought of the interests of she who had sought my advice, and see, the advice that I had offered also became of benefit to me. Father and I were reconciled, there was not another word about what had happened. Father caressed me again and spoke to me as if nothing had happened! How miserable I would have been earlier, before I came to know Nellie, in the face of Father's wrath and disfavour but now we have God to lean on and to trust in and we remained calm in these circumstances!

After this we said our farewells to Annie! – it was miserable but on the outside no one could see anything. Perhaps Anne even considered us cold! – but we know now: silence is the interpreter of deep feeling. After Annie's farewell, you will never guess what happened to us: we became mother confessor of someone almost 2x our age. This strange affair was a singular experience. Strange things have happened to us but this must be the oddest of all. We heard the confession with parental approval. On that occasion we gained a friend for the Javanese and a friend for our endeavours. 'You are real devils, to lay down the law to an old man.' It sounded so spontaneous that we broke into a fit of laughter.

Funny that in our attempts to help others along the path to the good, to true happiness – to find peace for the soul – we find people older than ourselves, clutching our hand. It provides such a wonderfully sweet feeling to be conscious of being able to help others. We do not <u>at all</u> delude ourselves that we are 'beacons', and that for that reason many weeping hearts come to us for support and comfort but we think people instinctively feel they can find love with us. We think it's wonderful that we can love – can give ourselves to others! Poor hearts that cannot love!

We asked some very silly questions, but we were assured beforehand that we could ask anything. Amongst other things we asked: 'When a man loves a woman what does he think of in the first place: "shall I be able to make her happy?" or "shall I be made happy through her?"' The unfortunate soul being pestered scratched his ear: 'That is a deuced difficult question! But I promised to answer everything honestly. I think the latter, first, and I believe that all men,

with a few exceptions think similarly because the bulk of men are egotistical, you women are morally on a much higher plane.'

We knew it was meant sincerely. We have learnt much from that man, and we told him that quite frankly. He has taught us patience and self-control that he often put severely to the test. As materialistic as he is, he could sound out terribly against what we greatly cherished. When he so provocatively ridiculed and pulled things to pieces, then it was often only with the greatest difficulty that we were able to maintain our calm. And now he acknowledged that he had mocked us because he had not wanted to admit to himself that what we had said had made an impression on him; often he had lain awake half the night thinking about it. He had never thought about these things, and had simply let life roll on. Now he feels how empty it is. We told him how easy it was to live life superficially but that the soul would not allow itself to be repressed and sooner or later it would emerge. It expresses itself in feelings of dissatisfaction, emptiness – this is how it cries for food! 'It's true, my life is so empty! But why has my soul not cried out earlier?' 'You have refused to listen to it.'

He was surprised at how some of the things we said expressed precisely what he thought. 'Then there must be something to the idea of souls, the affinity of souls, etc., it scares me,' he said with an echo of his former mocking tone. Now we could endure his derision better, now that we know it is largely a shield for his real feelings.[284]

We thank God that we are able to love!

The next day we travelled to Semarang, overheard much in the tram and what happened to us that evening we will recount to you later in detail, now we will pass over it in silence.[285] The following day we spoke to the president of the Theosophical Association who declared himself willing to initiate us, again we heard much that gave us food for thought. That evening, the two old friends met again to be separated the following morning. On board we met acquaintances amongst whom was Dr Groneman[286] whom we completely

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284 There is no indication who might be referred to here and Kartini clearly wished to avoid identifying him.

285 Kartini later clarifies that travel to Semarang was via steam tram from Pecangaan via Kudus. Her account of this visit is reminiscent of her first two published stories (see below Part Four). It is is full of descriptions of individuals and allusions to 'modernity': the mix of travelers heading to a city brought together in a way that ignored the usual cultural – colonial and Javanese – prescriptions. The scenario is reflected in her early short story, 'A Governor General's Day'.

286 Dr Isaac Groneman was an archaeologist, chair of the Archaeological Society of Yogyakarta and author of numerous books on Javanese antiquities.

forgot to thank for the manuscripts which he had been so kind to send us. He has continuously been very nice to us, we came to know him through our correspondence and we met him briefly later. It would have been better had this not happened; we had at first given him our unqualified admiration and after the meeting he lost much of that gloss.

On board we also met Heer Boissevain, a brother of Hilda de Booij, who has written to me about him. We paid him a visit and made the acquaintance of his very charming Irish wife, who spoke perfect Dutch, and his pretty daughter. We were very soon the best of friends, it was wonderful to have such a little white angel on your lap or in your arms. It is still unable to talk, but understands everything – Dutch, Malay and English. It was wonderful to be able to spoil that little treasure, which, miracle of miracles, was not shy or frightened of us Javanese as many other European children are!

That evening we wended our way with leaden feet to the house of the resident. A month ago the R. had been here in the vicinity, had stayed at a sugar concern and as good people, we came to bring our civil father our respects. And that had been very much appreciated! We had just experienced some wearying and sorrowful days, Ma had just returned from Tegal where Sis, who had been very ill, was staying, and that morning our house guest, Heer van Lawick v. P., had only just left, yet we still climbed sweetly into the bumpy coach and in a death-defying trip allowed ourselves to be rattled to pieces. We were prepared to put up with all that to pay our compliments to the R.. We received a charming reception! Not one of us was dignified with a word. R. and I were not piqued but we did have sympathy for the old man who had not yet learned self-control. Annie was the butt of all the teasing that evening. 'I would rather that I was told straight-out like you do, "I am frightened of you", than that one pretends to trust me and do everything behind my back'. And then, at another time: 'No, I want to do nothing more for young ladies, if you give them advice they still go their own way.'

Inwardly we had to laugh but outwardly we looked as completely innocent and unassuming as a cow. We were not concerned for ourselves, but for our parents it was most unpleasant. We were not piqued at being ignored in a gathering, indeed we should have been pleased that it had happened to us, it served to build our character! Saying farewell to him on departure, he held my hand – longer than necessary. Now I was at fault, I walked on while he continued holding my hand. When handshakes were over he withdrew himself from the others, leaned against a pole, and regarded us two. Annie was furious about much that he had dared say to her and that 'loving' treatment he had given us also pained her.

You can imagine that after these events we made the social call that evening very reluctantly. He had not yet arrived when we came, he was still working in his office, his mother received us, another guest was still being expected, the wife of the Resident of Pekalongan. When this person had been there already for some time, he came outside. I sat in the furthest corner, and was the last to shake his hand, earnestly and for a long time. I let it be but did not respond.

We sat in the dark – the conversation was in full swing but we did not participate. His sister came outside, she was noticeably cool towards us, normally she would totally overwhelm us to a frightening degree but now she dignified us with not a single syllable. Instead her glance never left us alone, even when she was speaking with others. It was amusing! How sweetly she looked at us! Oh, one could easily see how dearly she loved us. The mother spoke a few words to us from time to time.

Then, suddenly, in the midst of an animated conversation to which we were but bystanders, he asked me, 'Have you seen the summerhouses I have had made in my garden?' 'No.' 'Do you want to see them? Yes? Then come with me, I will show them to you.'

I stood up as did the sisters and followed him to the back of the house, to the garden at the back of the house, where the summerhouses were. 'Goodness me,' I thought to myself, 'what can this mean? Take care now, don't say or do anything foolish.'

He showed us the summerhouses, the garden and then stood, hesitating. We heard a sound like a waterfall. 'What is that?' 'That is the lock, do you want to see it?' 'Gladly.' He seemed to hesitate and then asked, 'Do you dare?' 'Why not?' I replied simply. 'Come, I will take you there.' Like ducklings we walked one behind the other along small paths over a rise, the house slipping further and further from sight behind us. 'Is this the promised long walk which he had wanted to take with us?' we asked ourselves. It must have a purpose – this long walk at night along lonely paths.

He had a bad cold and was walking there bare-headed through the cold night air, surely one does not do that for pleasure. What was it then? Was he giving us an opportunity, or himself, to say something! That he had something on his mind was obvious; we did not make it easy for him. For many reasons we did not want to say the first word, we were also thinking of his strange attitude towards us on that evening. Had that not intervened then we may have spoken but now we did not want to begin but also for other reasons we did not dare. Perhaps it was rather foolish of me to let such a wonderful opportunity slip by but we could not think of ourselves, we had first to think of our parents, and then of our brothers. To him we left the honour of speaking the first word but

he was not able to rise to it, apparently embarrassed by the presence of sister Kartinah, who was also with us. That he wanted to say something to us was obvious, he was nervous – and we walked the entire way talking all sorts of nonsense.

Poor fools, walking that long way in the cold night air along difficult paths, small wobbly bridges without supports across channels, for nothing. Hand in hand like foolish children we crossed them! It was a long walk of over an hour but for him still not long enough, he had to show us his paintings and the upstairs. Returning from the walk, we were met by the enraged screaming of his sister, who was carrying on against a nephew who was unwell and who had gone with us. That screaming pained us. That was civilization! We listened dumbfounded – we had never experienced such a thing! And he himself, he laughed at her. We were still in the back of the house when Mev. Steinmetz came looking for the Resident to say goodbye to him, but he did not show her out as he normally would do for his guests and remained calmly showing us his paintings. From there we went upstairs, and again this took place without interruption.[287]

Poor, poor man, we are very sorry for him. He was panting when he came downstairs again. In the passage I said to him: 'I remind you of your promise.' Swiftly he turned to me, and asked expectantly: 'Yes, and what was that?' I spoke, but did not say what he seemed to have been expecting. He took us to the office to show us something. To no avail, the important words would not escape! From there we finally returned to the company. Good heavens – how sweetly his sister looked at us! She was ogling both of us so sweetly. What we could have done to that dear person I honestly could not tell you but it was amazing how sweetly she was regarding us. All of a sudden he asked: 'What will it be Kartini, are you going to Holland? And you, Roekmini, will you? You should stay, believe me, it is better here than in Holland.' His mother and sister prevented us from answering and told us ever so sweetly: 'Only go to Holland if you are loaded with money, otherwise don't.' Very <u>delicate</u>! I considered it not worth wasting any words to respond, I did not utter a syllable, but if they had thought that I would lower my eyes, then they were mistaken. I looked them straight in the eye.

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287 Kartini's account of this visit appears to imply inappropriate intentions on the part of Resident Sijthoff. Kartini reveals herself to be thoroughly in control in this nominally asymmetrical relationship but equally aware that her future plans, and indeed her father's position, depended on handling the situation as diplomatically as possible. This may have been the event that had angered her father as reported earlier in the letter.

There was some talk that shortly there might be a theatre performance in Semarang; should it go ahead they would telegraph us, we should come and stay with him again. I said neither yes or no, merely smiled, the most innocent thing I could do, so long as it was not mocking. At our departure he was all heartiness, once again the old business of a long and heartfelt handshake, we let it be, it could do no harm. We had to return on a Sunday morning and he would take us on a long walk again. So long as it did not once again lead to nothing, like this time! Now we did dare and were willing to speak but I do not need to tell you that we will be constantly on our guard.

We are very pleased for our parents that all is now all right between him and us. Honestly we have a deep pity for him and not the least feeling of revenge. What could have been on his mind this last evening? Was he perhaps sorry about what had happened or was it something else? We do not know but it is certain that he will be prepared to help us with open heart if we can do something for him.

Poor man! Poor in the midst of wealth and beauty! All lifeless objects, and the little people who surround him daily with flattery – all self-seekers! He has nothing to which he can give of himself heart and soul, there is no one who without self-interest surrounds him with love. We are a thousand times more fortunate than he, we have a high ideal, a love, and we have love! If only we could give him some of our wealth! But one cannot be given good fortune if one does not wish it.

We do not dare to think about it, let alone hope but still how wonderful it would be if we could strum one snare of his heart, so long smothered by materialism! If we could awaken one spark of God in him into a strong flame!

Thinking about all of this brings with it a peaceful and incredibly sweet feeling and besides that, a deep gratitude. Our life is very rich, even though there is much bitterness there is also much sweetness.

We are happiest and feel ourselves most blessed when we are able to help our fellow man. In physical terms we have nothing to offer, what we do have and can give is our love! We ourselves often think it strange that people, so much older than us, married and mothers of grown up children, weep about their suffering in our arms. We are so thankful if then we are able to dry even one tear. Whoever has experienced that feeling will never want to or be able to forget it.

So do not worry about us, dearest, if our future may become sombre, so long as on this earth there are tears to dry or hearts wanting love, your brown friends will have work and will be busy, that is to say: will be happy. Really, do not worry about us, not now nor later, never! Present us to the Supreme Being,

to the Father of Love! He will help us, support us, comfort and enlighten us. Be assured, and do not mourn, we know our God. He knows us and will lovingly lead us, if we desire the good, then he will help us; if we wish ill, then we will not avoid our punishment. This knowledge maintains us and provides us with such peace. We strive to become really strong so that we can help ourselves, to help oneself is often more difficult than to help others. And whoever can help themselves will be able to help others even more.

I can always speak to you about anything, can I not? I am often afraid that I tire you with my chatter. How are you all? Everything is all right I hope? Did you proceed with that short trip to Wijnkoopsbaai? And how did you like it?

I would very much like to receive back the letters which I sent you; just send them, without accompanying letter if you do not have time for it. Just write: 'Hullo child!, we are fine', and then we will be happy.

Do you not think it nice that *Bintang Hindia* accepted Nellie's letter and translated it into Malay?[288] The editor wrote a few words to accompany it. Do you think it is all right if we communicate with the editors of *Bintang Hindia*, that group of Native young people in the Netherlands who want to educate and develop their compatriots in the faraway fatherland? We would then already have a group of soulmates to begin with. It would be wonderful if we could completely win them over! If we go to Holland then we want to be sisters and friends to them. We envisage a free, natural camaraderie between those boys and us. My brother knows them all. I shall write to him to arrange for all of them to visit Moedertje one day, to hear about the plans and ideas of the sisters. Moedertje thinks that would be a nice idea. Will you also win hearts for us where you can, I do not even have to ask you this, you have already been doing it.[289]

Goodnight my dearest. Give Mijnheer and your sister our heartiest regards from us all.

A firm embrace from your own,
R and K[290]

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288 *Bintang Hindia* was a primarily Dutch language periodical founded by pioneer Sumatran journalist, Abdul Rivai, and a son of the Sultan of Yogyakarta, RMA Koesoema Joedha, in association with former Dutch military officer, Clockener Brousson. It was aimed at 'Inlanders who had learned to read and understand Dutch' and was designed to be 'educational'. In 1903 it opened an office in Buitenzorg (Bogor). By that year it was reported to have 14,000 subscribers. Nellie's letter may have been the letter she had sent to *Oost en West* which introduced Kartini to its readers.

289 Kartini undoubtedly recognizes the influence the Abendanons can exercise in Batavia to generate support for Kartini and her sister's endeavour.

290 Kartini usually wrote as if on behalf of Roekmini but rarely included her name. On occasions Roekmini also stated she was writing on behalf of Kartini. The style of this

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

22 September 1902

Dearest, I am delighted – oh, so happy! You have been relaxing and have so enjoyed it! I absolutely devoured the happiness in your letter, which had been missing in them for so long! I thank God for those days of wonderful enjoyment that He offered to you! We all have need of such relaxation, and especially you need it.

I refresh myself with the thought of you, childishly happy and elated, gloriously enjoying the grandeur of nature! We are so happy, so very happy, that our dear one enjoyed it so much, we are so thankful that you were so happy in those holidays! Wonderful feeling, it makes you come alive again, to feel young and feel at one with the nature that surrounds you, to drink in deep draughts of that which Mother Nature offers! The city with its restlessness we need for our spirit, our soul demands nature and solitude.[291] I am so glad, so happy with your joyful letter that I have had to snatch up the pen immediately to convey to you our happiness.

As it happens, it is not a convenient moment. In bed, in front of me, lies our youngest brother who has had a high temperature since yesterday. His temperature has now dropped a little. Thank God! Dear, good little fellow, not a complaining word, not a sigh have we heard from him, he is so sweet and patient! But let me not write about our little fellow. Your good mood must not be destroyed by laments from the sick room. I want to exult, I want to be happy with you!

Sincere thanks for sharing our sorrow at the departure of our friends. We had so hoped that you would still have been able to see them. From your letter we see that they would not have been able to visit you. It was just in the days that they were there that you were in Buitenzorg. How you enjoyed yourself, my dear, kind 'Oudje'! It is wonderful to have you so young and happy again!

I read in the paper that the concert provided by the Italians in honour of the race meeting was apparently very good and that Their Excellencies and their guests expressed their appreciation on numerous occasions! I did not know then that my dear one was numbered amongst the guests! Perhaps it is due to our undeveloped taste but we are unable to gain any enjoyment from horse racing itself, although we greatly admire beautiful horses and love to see them.

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letter, however, is clearly that of Kartini.

291 This construct reflects a typical turn of the century Dutch romantic literary image, contrasting urban modernity with an idyllic rural pastorale.

But we have yet to learn to develop any enthusiasm for watching them being driven hard; for ourselves we hope never to learn it. The nicest type of race we think is the ladies 'bendie' race. That is really a delight to see: young girls, young and fresh as the morning dew, lightly dressed, like flowers, riding the circuit in light carts with fiery horses!

I should tell you that we have once known the extravagant luxury of possessing a race club. A few years ago we buried the Jepara Race Club with music, flowers and champagne at the former Residency capital of Pati.

Do I have to tell you what pleasure I had from your delight with the small screen! Wonderful that it so appealed to you both! It was a very fine idea that you suggested to me. Tell Mijnheer, would you, that I thank His Excellency for his faith in me. I shall do my best not to put him to shame, that is, your little girl will test her abilities on making the desired article and see what can be done. But a request: do not raise your expectations of it too high and do have a little patience! The previous week I had to refuse someone who suggested that I write about the Jepara woodcraft for *De Echo*. It did appeal to me but I have still so much writing to do and so I wrote back that I did not dare take it on, which is now not entirely an invention.[292] That lady will write about it in the Batavia and Soerabaya newspapers.

And now I will certainly disappoint you. The portrait stand has not yet been made. I did not dare have it made as you had never replied to my suggestions so that I was not to know whether you were interested in it or not. Dearest, please do not see this as a reproach, I would feel very miserable if you did. You have continually so much to do and think about that that little matter no doubt escaped your mind and when you were reminded of it by the screen you assumed in good faith that it had already been completed some time ago. Forgive me that I had not reminded you about it. I could have and should have, knowing how much you always have in hand and have to think about. Forgive me, dearest!

The most unpleasant aspect of the whole business is that you must now <u>wait</u>. Before the order from Oost en West has been completed I do not dare give these people more new work because if that particular work is not completed on time then your little girl is the one who will get it in the neck. Also the screen for the G.G. must be completed.

Why don't you draw up a list of what you would like to order. Your order will then be the first to be attended to, you know that. But at the moment we

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[292] This writing did eventuate and became 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje' published in *Eigen Haard* in 1903. See below Kartini's letter to Mevrouw Abendanon, 21 November 1902.

honestly cannot do anything for you and you appreciate the reason for this, don't you? Still, little minds are at your service, shall we think of something for you?

We have again thought of something new and we have had this made for Oost en West.[293] If the physical realization of the idea pleases then I will tell you about it immediately, even before Oost en West have received these objects. We continue to be enthusiastic about sister's cupboard – you should see it! – and we feel certain that you would lose your heart to it. Of course we would love to have your small table made – if something is not clear then I have only to turn to you for clarification is that not so?

Heer Rooijaards was so kind to us. He sent us the invitations to the performance of 'Julius Caesar' but, alas, it did not take place and he had someone telegraph to inform us. Nice of him, was it not? We have written to him and thanked him warmly for his friendliness.

And now, dearest: goodnight! Give Mijnheer and your sister regards from us all, and for yourself a hearty kiss from R and your own

Kartini

To Nicolaus Adriani

24 September 1902

Highly esteemed Sir and Friend

How can I describe our joy when we received your friendly postcard and little book.[294] We are oh so grateful to you for having written to us. Now we dare to write to you again.

It is scandalous how we have ignored you. We are deeply ashamed about it! We have no excuse for it and we won't try to look for one nor offer you one, other than to honestly and openly admit our guilt. It was a weakness on our part that had for so long maintained our silence. This is a sad confession on the part of people like us who want to take on a great task. You, as a person of love, will judge us gently, taking into consideration our youth and inexperience.

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293 Kartini's involvement in the Jepara woodcraft industry clearly led to its modernization not only in terms of financing and administration of the work but also in terms of design which, it is here suggested, increasingly shifted away from traditional styles and designs to accommodate the tastes of the modern domestic European home.

294 This may be a copy of the reader prepared by Adriani and containing the first literary transcription of traditional Pamona oral literature for use in the mission school in Central Sulawesi which he had completed by 1900.

My fault with regard to you is very great: but greater still is the wrong we thereby have done to ourselves. Forgive us! We have been weak. Will you help us to become strong? We have to be so to be able to undertake the great task that we so badly want to embark upon. We are still young, are standing only at the very beginning of our task, of our lives; we young, inexperienced people – the two of us, all alone. So many thoughts have tossed around in our heads, so many emotions have touched these young hearts. So often we have longed to talk to our friends but we, inexperienced children, were too weak and unskilled to be able to tear ourselves loose from the countless thoughts and emotions that held us prisoner. Sister has already told you what has been and is still happening in our hearts and heads, about what has happened in our lives in recent months, about our plans, our dreams for the future. We hope that you will be interested in them.

During many extremely emotional and often difficult days, thinking of you – noble people – has often been a comfort, a support and refreshment. What saddens us so in this life is people's egotism that often knows no boundaries. And when melancholy overtakes us at seeing and learning about such gross selfishness, 'that horrible monster' that surrounds us on all sides, we think of you both and a great tenderness comes over our pained heart. Despite all the selfishness, it is Love that appears to rule the world.

In the midst of this furious thinking and feeling about the many things that in this life can but cause pain to and discourage sensitive natures such as ours, to think of you both is like a refreshing draught that strengthens us. We often talk and think about you and that does a lot of good. Unknowingly you both gave us such support and comfort in many a difficult hour. We thank God that we were able to meet you along our way and hope passionately that we may be allowed to keep your friendship throughout our lives.[295]

You now know our plans, our goal, our striving. We don't have to ask you, our heart tells us, that you have already, and will continue to often, pray on behalf of your young Javanese friends to Above, to the Almighty, to the Supreme Being to give them strength and support.

However different the roads may be that we travel down, they all lead to one and the same end: the Good. We also serve the Good, that you call God and we Allah. Why shouldn't we tell you? We always want to be honest and frank towards you – a friendship or any relationship that is not based on honesty will not withstand the test of time and we want our friendship that is very dear to us to last our whole lives through.

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[295] Adriani continued to visit Roekmini in Jepara from time to time after Kartini's death.

For a long time God, Allah, was merely an invocation. Thank God that now that wonderful name has become a sacred sound with a holy meaning. Oh, how can I tell you how happy I am, how quiet and peaceful it now is within us, now that we have found Him, who we can entirely give ourselves over to, that we can lean on and trust. We are so content and feel safe in His care. There is a Father who knows us, sees us and judges us with love!

Who gave us this precious gift, enabled us to find this belief in the Omnipotent? Mevrouw Nellie van Kol. Even if beforehand it was already beginning to develop and ferment, we ourselves were unconscious of the fact that we were undergoing a spiritual process. The fact is and remains that it was Mevrouw van Kol who swept away the fog before our eyes as a result of which the Light began to shine brightly upon us. It was she who helped us find the way to the father of Love who you call God and we call Allah.

We feel so utterly happy with this golden treasure within us, the conviction, the absolute belief, in the existence of the Father of Love. That belief allows us to see everything in another and better light: it reconciles and comforts us and makes us more free and happier.[296]

He who truly serves God is free, is imprisoned by no man. Depending, building on the support of people is to have one's soul bound, to allow oneself to be imprisoned by people. And why shouldn't we say it? We have depended on, and trusted people. Bitter experience has taught that we have lost our way, on what a loose foundation we have been building.[297] This great disappointment in people had for a long time embittered us, but gradually this faded and we learned to understand, to understand and forgive. We ourselves were at fault, we had to recognize that no matter how kind and dear they were, they were only people. Recently we read our Ten Commandments, and we thought a long time about the first of these. It says that God is jealous, does not tolerate that others gods are worshipped as well as Him and therefore in bitter disappointment punishes those people who make a god figure out of another human being and worship him as a god. But we think: 'Thou shalt have no God before me' is a commandment full of love! It contains a serious and humane warning: 'The human being is a human being', a weak fallible being! Were only this warning better understood mankind would have been spared much bitter suffering.

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296 Kartini undoubtedly considered that Adriani would be interested in this lengthy account of her renewed religious conviction since he was indirectly involved in missionary work. Although there is no indication that Adriani attempted to 'convert' Kartini, his letters may have addressed the kind of general discussion on religion that Nellie van Kol's had, and he did send her articles regarding mission work.

297 These sentences almost precisely replicate a section of Kartini's letter to Marie Ovink of October 1900.

As very young children we were very religious, that is to say, we loyally followed what the majority did and what people required of us that we also did. Yet there came a time when our spirit demanded to be listened to; began to ask questions of what we were doing, the question 'why' arose in us about everything.

That 'why' became increasingly louder within us, and in the end we spoke it out aloud. We wanted to know, wanted chapter and verse about everything. On questions of religion we received no answers, it was too holy to be explained to us. And what, thoughtlessly, we were once content to do along with the majority, we could now no longer do consciously. We did not want to learn to read and recite fables whose meaning we did not know. The Koran was written in Arabic, a language that even our religious teacher did not know. We could no longer follow along with everyone else, to the deep regret of people in our vicinity.

Then we learned of the intolerance of many teachers of religion and so much that was bad was done in the name of religion. We saw so much that was ugly, so much hypocrisy and we completely turned away from all that sham piety business that is here called religion but that in reality is for many just a disguise for hypocrisy.

We were still children and how far can the thoughts of children reach? Then we could not know that all that ugliness was not from God but from people, that originally everything was beautiful but that people destroyed beauty, made it ugly by their narrow-mindedness, some on purpose, some through egotism, vanity or egotism.

We are so grateful for what Mevrouw van Kol has allowed us to find and even if she and her husband may perhaps never be given the opportunity to be able to help us again, we will always regard our acquaintance with those two noble souls as a greater treasure than everything else put together.[298]

Oh, we cannot be grateful enough for the existence of that heavenly invention called correspondence. It has brought so much benefit and love into our lives. What would our lives be without that much praised invention: correspondence. Superior thoughts in books and other publications that we have received have had an educational, developmental, ennobling and uplifting influence on us. They have an even greater impact when they come directly from the people whose mind and spirit produced them. We can never be sufficiently grateful that we belong to the privileged group who are in

[298] The preceding section of the letter was deleted from the 1911 publication and is indicative of the editorial control exercised by Abendanon to remove sensitive material that could offend or reflect on Kartini's character.

direct communication with a number of superior minds and spirits. This so enriches and sweetens our lives. It is something to celebrate when we receive letters that we know – because of who they were written by – will contain, in Nellie's words, 'thoughts that will spread happiness and love'. You can guess who would be amongst those who can provide us with such festive days via the mail.

We have read the writings that you have kindly sent us with great interest and pleasure. We regard it as a great privilege to know the writer of these interesting articles personally and to receive them directly from him. Mevrouw Abendanon has told us already so much about your lecture in Batavia two years ago. She discussed it with such enthusiasm. We were very keen to know what was said on 3 September 1900.[299] How overjoyed we were then, when you fulfilled that wish without knowing it. And how wonderful it would be to hear about what has been printed, directly from you!

When will it be that that dear wish of ours may be fulfilled? We hope that it will happen one day and that it won't be too long in coming.

And now we thank you heartily for your kindness in sending us the very educational, absorbing and significant reading material. We enjoyed it very much and have absorbed a lot of it. We read with great interest the life story of 'Njai Magdelenah'.[300] We had read about this religious, God-fearing woman before, I think most recently in the *Hollandsche Revue*. It is such a shame that Mapane[301] is so far away and so difficult to reach, otherwise it would be such a joy to come to see you! There is so much that we would love to discuss with you and it is difficult to put everything down on paper. The longest, most detailed letter can't compare to a quiet hour of conversation. In discussion, one can express one's ideas and plans so much better.

The report on the final exam of the pupil teachers at the teacher training school for native teachers at Tomohon[302] greatly interested us: we read it with a growing interest and pleasure. We would love to know the history of that land and its people. And what we would also love to see there is the boarding school for girls in Tomohon. We could learn so much from that. We have

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299 This lecture was presented to the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap and was entitled: 'Mededeelingen omtrent de Toradjas van Midden-Celebes'. It included a critical account of the attitudes of Muslim states towards the Dutch government as well as a detailed account of the aims of the Poso mission. It was published in Vol. 44 (1901) of *Tijdschrift van het Bataviaasch Genootschap*.

300 'Njai Magdelenah' is presumably a Malay rendition of the story of Mary Magdelene.

301 Mapane was the colonial administrative post for the Gulf of Tomini.

302 Tomohon, in the Minahassa, North Sulawesi, was a centre for the Christian missions and included a training school for native Protestant mission school teachers.

long had an interest in the Minahassa and the Minahassans.[303] Now that we have a friend in the area who is beginning the work of civilizing the headhunters we are even more interested in these regions and their people.[304]

I hope you will always gain satisfaction from your work; this is a prayer that often comes from the depth of my heart when I think of you and your work. How I would love to spend some time at your mission post, amongst missionaries. We think it would be so wonderful to be amongst those so pure of heart and who love solely for Love. When our heart is restless, in revolt against fate, how beneficial the influence of such a pure atmosphere of love would be. Who knows whether this wish might be fulfilled one day. But, as often happens, the fulfilment of dearly held wishes is often accompanied by tears.

If we were allowed to go to Mojowarno we will put paid to our other dreams and illusions: we will have killed them and buried them. Sister has already told you what our plans are if we can't realize our goal, if we can't study for the subjects that we would really like to be qualified for, and have to give up our dreams: that is to establish a school for daughters of the native aristocracy. It is not that Mojowarno is a kind of bogy for us. I had told you once before how we viewed it: outwardly – busy, restless; from a spiritual point of view, a peaceful refuge. But you appreciate that it would be a bitter disappointment to give up our ideals that we have so long carried with us and dreamed of.

To Professor Anton

4 October 1902

In truth we have wanted to take up our pen to write to you many times but each time something intervened that caused me to postpone writing. I was waiting for a suitable occasion … now I realize such an occasion never presents itself, it has to be made.

Letters to indifferent people are more easily written, or rather, one gets round to writing them more readily than epistles to people for whom one

303 After centuries of contact and intermarriage, the largely Christian Minahassans had gained an impressive level of general education and were widely employed in the colonial civil service and military.

304 Kartini appears to share the colonial perception of the Outer Islands as being inhabited by primitive peoples – in this case the inhabitants of Central Sulawesi – and the value of Christian missions, such as that with which Adriani was associated, in civilizing them. Later however Kartini advocates 'mission without baptism', that is, development without attempts to convert.

cares. In the case of the former, one has nothing to say, one can make do with a few sentences; but to our friends we want to write more extended letters.

Last year there was constant cause for sorrow in the Jepara kabupaten. One after the other people became ill and each time so seriously that we were constantly anxious that someone we dearly loved might pass away. Thank God everything turned out all right. The new year commences with a combination of joy and sorrow. On 24 January we celebrated sister's wedding, the day our Kardinah, the youngest member of the cloverleaf, married. This was a happy event but sadness was also attached to it. We, who had been so close, now had to separate. After her departure there was such a painful emptiness. So much love accompanied her out the door.

We have been to visit her once, in April. She was looking very well on that occasion, she had put on weight which she never did at home, and had pink cheeks. Ma went to see her again in August. She went, full of anxiety in her heart, because it was a severe illness that had called her to sister's bedside. The colour had left her cheeks but we were thankful that Ma found sister alive. She was in a very bad way, a severe attack of malaria. Now she has recovered and is spending time in the mountains to regain her energy in the cool climate.

We read with great interest your fascinating piece, 'Een Tolverbond met Nederland'[305] and we thank you once again for your kind attention in sending us the article. We prize your kindness greatly. We also read several articles written in response to yours. From an article by Mr P. Brooshooft, chief editor of *De Locomotief*, we learned that the translation of this much discussed piece by Professor Anton was by his dear, clever wife.[306]

It is wonderful when a man regards his wife not just as a housekeeper, a mother of his children but also as a friend, who takes an interest in his work, and shares it with him. This is undoubtedly of priceless value for a man, at least as long as he is not narrow-minded or a pedant. There are certainly enough of those who see merely curiosity and interference in the interest their wives take in their work. You can see that here I am gently referring to the subject of women's emancipation about which you would have heard more than enough in Europe. If the women's question has already attracted your attention, you will have to give it more of your attention in the coming years because now you have a daughter yourself to raise.

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[305] In this article, Anton, a professor in political science, had advocated the economic merger of the Netherlands and Germany. He was in the Indies to investigate Dutch colonial policy and practice.

[306] His wife was Dutch.

When we here ask for education for girls, yes indeed pray and beg for it, it is not because we want to make women the competitors of men in the struggle of life but because we, convinced as we are about the great influence that a woman can have on life, wish to make women better prepared for their great role that Mother Nature herself has given her: as mother – the first educator of mankind! A person receives his very first education from a woman doesn't he, and this, in most cases, remains of significance for his entire life.

It is the woman, the mother, who lays down the very first seeds of virtue and vice in a person's heart which usually stays with that person for the rest of their lives.

It is not without reason that it is said: 'he or she absorbed with his mother's milk.'

Long ago we thought that whoever was well educated was also advanced morally. Alas, we were soon disabused of that idea – we came to see that an advanced intellectual development was not in the least a guarantee for moral superiority. This discovery left us deeply disturbed and affected. When we recovered from this emotional shock we thought further about this question to understand its causes. And that led us to confront another truth: 'It is not only the school which develops the mind of the child, but especially the home must also educate! The school develops its intellect, the family its character.'

The mother, the central point of the family, has been assigned a great task in the development of her children: that is, their moral development. Girls must be given a good education to prepare them properly for the great task.

Oh, if only Mothers knew what they are given when they receive the greatest gift a woman can receive: precious motherhood. When they give birth they also take on the future. Oh, if only they clearly understood this duty that motherhood demands of them. It is not for herself that she has given birth to a child: she must raise it for the larger family of which one day it will become a part, the gigantic family that is called Society!

It is for this that we ask for the education of girls.

We are totally convinced that the standard of the Javanese people will not be able to substantially progress as long as women continue to be prevented from contributing to it. Women must be given the task of development: then the Javanese people will rapidly progress. Develop strong, intelligent mothers and Java will gain strong workers to labour for its advancement. They will transfer their education and development onto their children; their daughters, who will later become mothers themselves; their sons who one day will be called upon to watch over the interests of the people.

Oh, when will the time come that my compatriots will support these ideas? I fear that that time is still a long way off! But if a start is not made then it will be even longer off, will take even longer.[307]

All beginnings are difficult and for many pioneers life can be full of bitter hardships. And it is very understandable that parents would rather that their children choose a future for themselves that will guarantee them a happy life than one which they know in advance with certainty will be painful.

If one carries a great ambition in one's heart and that goal does not aim at one's own good fortune but the welfare of others, is it then a sin to try to reach that goal, even if thereby one breaks the heart of people one loves? Or should one's duty be to tear that ideal from one's bosom for the sake of those hearts?

How should one make oneself most useful for one's fellow man: through self-sacrifice or self-fulfilment? Self-sacrifice for the sake of loved ones, or self-fulfilment in the service of that larger family, Society?

Oh, how beautiful it is to want, to be able, to be allowed! This combination, alas, is only available to a few.

* * * *

It was with great pleasure we made the acquaintance of Frits Reuter.[308] That is literature one can read one's fill of. It is so fresh and uplifting one has quickly read it. You have done us a great pleasure in sending us this present. Others here have also enjoyed reading this wonderful work. For them it was just as with us: having commenced reading they couldn't stop. Can you imagine, reading non-stop from 7 o'clock in the evening till 3 o'clock at night. That is not very intelligent but understandable if one is of such excellent company. If it was your intention to have us fall in love with your national poet then you certainly have had success. Frits Reuter has gained a place in our love and respect.

We greatly enjoyed Couperus' marvellous work.[309] Previously we had read him because of the wonderfully fine language, although the characters he presents in his work we usually find rather sickly. But now both language and content speak to us. Delightful speeches! The Netherlands can certainly be proud of such an artist.

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307 This succinct statement advocating the education of Javanese women forms the substance of her later memoranda of January and April the following year.

308 Fritz Reuter (1810–1874) was a German poet and writer.

309 Though the title is not given it is likely to be the recently published *De Stille Kracht* (1900), Couperus' only novel set exclusively in Java.

The excellent works by Vosmaer[310] have provided us with great enjoyment. We were greatly moved by his beautiful *Inwijding*. It was the first time we had made the acquaintance of this Dutch writer and we thank you very much for introducing to us one of the best in his field. After receiving *Inwijding* we received a book on Greek mythology with images of Greek gods and goddesses from Greek divinity. It was marvellous to see these pictures and read their descriptions after having read *Inwijding*. Oh, how wonderful it would be to see these for oneself, to undergo the experience that so thrilled Sieske and Frank at seeing such Greatness and Beauty. No, no, do not ask for so much! Let us just be thankful that there is someone so blessed with a mastery of language that he is able to describe this Beauty in such a lively way and that we are able to understand his language!

For the last few months one of the Netherlands' greatest artists has been in Java, our beautiful fatherland. The stage actor and reciter, Willem Rooijaards has made a veritable triumphal march across our Land of the Sun. Everywhere he went he received the acclaim of audiences who enjoyed his great abilities. We would have loved to hear him. Last month we were on the point of going to see him to enjoy his art when the performance he was going to give was cancelled. So we were unable to see that great artist on stage but another pleasure was vouchsafed to us. We were able to speak to him in person. We had not counted on this at all, we met him entirely unexpectedly – it was a wonderful surprise, a plaster on a wound that had struck our hearts at the same time.

The occasion that led to this unexpected meeting was a sad one. We were saying farewell to our friends the Ovink family and on board the little steamboat taking us to the big ship that was to take our friends to their own country, we met Herr Rooijaards who was also saying farewell to the Ovink family.

It was a painful moment for us when we had to let go of our friends – and God knows, perhaps forever because they will not be coming back to the Indies. There is no chance we will see them again unless 'the luckiest of lucky stars' brings us to their country!

Is there a chance for this? Time, that provides an answer for all the big questions in life will also provide an answer to this!

They are so dear! We felt as thought a piece of us was being torn from us, when the two boats drew apart! They had become part of our soul! It is so often claimed that 'No lasting friendship, no complete meeting of minds can exist between children of different races, born in different hemispheres'. How that dictum is totally demolished here! A deeper more intimate friendship between

310 Carel Vosmaer (1826–1888) was a leading poet of the Tachtiger movement.

children from the same race could not be imagined than the friendship here between white children from the West and the brown children from the East! The soul, the unseen, the spiritual essence of us which is immortal, disregards that physical aspect. Wherever the soul meets a sister soul no dividing wall of race or belief exists any longer. With great joy the soul will greet such a soul living within a body of a different skin colour than hers, and unite with her – because she feels related to her. The relationship between souls is deeper than a blood relationship.

Blessed people who exist in this life – not just as blood relations – but to be soulmates, to be sisters and brothers in spirit and soul!

The controleur who you met here with us and who is also a friend of ours has replaced Heer Ovink as assistant-resident of Jombang.[311] This was just a question of good luck.

Life can often turn out strangely! Happiness sometimes chooses the most unlikely ways to approach us, and we, short-sighted people that we are, with our limited understanding, are very quick to complain when we cannot explain the purpose of The Infinite! And yet, everything is so simple if we are willing to see it. There is no light without first there being darkness: we see this day after day, evening after evening, day after night.

It would be so nice if you might one day meet the Ovink family in The Hague! I still regret that at the time you were unable to go to Jombang. You would then have been able to visit the Mojowarno Mission Station and that would have been very worthwhile. We also would love to go there but, alas, we have not been able to fulfil this wish. We would even like to stay there for a little while. It would undoubtedly do us good to breathe that holy, self-effacing atmosphere of love for a while. Pure air has a purifying and strengthening effect.

No person, no matter how degenerate, could fail to be influenced by such a noble, holy love!

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

8 October 1902

Dearest,

This letter should have been written a long time ago but all kinds of circumstances have intervened. You know me too well I hope, to think it could be indifference on my part if a letter is some time in coming, especially when

311 The reference is to WP Quartero.

it is 'perlu' like this one. I ask you a thousand times 'ampun' that I have made you wait so long for this.

Immediately the day after I received your letter I had asked the woodcraftsman to come and explained to him your order. That has been organized and we have only to work out how the bottom panel can be attached to the legs. There are 8 large and 8 small scallop shapes, how are these to be divided into three to attach the legs to them? Is the attachment to be made by means of screws? And where should the silver band be placed? This can all be worked out but now for the difficulty which could upset everything. Till now we have had people searching for sono wood large enough from which to cut the largest panel but hey have been unable to find any. The largest piece we could find is 40 cm wide while the diameter of the panel is 47 cm. I am desperate. What do I do now? If we absolutely want to have a table made of sono wood then we will have to reduce its size and bring the largest panel back from 47 cm to 42 cm. Would you consider two pieces joined together awful? It is not advisable, the joins separate as a result of the heat and then it becomes ugly.

We are still having them look for sono wood in the desa, we hope some may be found and then there will be no problem. I am very upset about it! The only order of significance that you have given me I may be unable to fulfil. Terrible. You will no doubt be very disappointed but I hope not angry because you will have understood that everything that can be done your girls will do if they have not already done so. I think it is very unpleasant for you and it is very unpleasant for me having to give you this message. I have not been able to write for several days because of my hand. Without any apparent reason my entire right hand became swollen, the doctor gave me a salve for it. Our sick little brother was very restless last night, I woke him and he finally fell asleep again, on my painful arm. I did not have the heart to move him for fear I might wake him. It gave me a terrible pain, as if my arm had been burned. The following morning I found my wrist decorated with blisters. I continued walking around for a few days with a swollen arm plus burns on my wrist. The doctor thinks it was blood poisoning. Everything is all right again now and I have been cured of an annoyance in my mouth yesterday. I received a compliment because I had not uttered a word during the operation whereas the doctor had expected that I would at least faint. We do not engage in such nonsense. Nevertheless it is a strange feeling to lose a molar.

The family here is very well although those elsewhere are less so. Yesterday and today cries for help were telegraphed from Pemalang. My sister is

ill once again, her husband has chickenpox and her eldest daughter has a high temperature. Oh, and a day before our parents had received such bright letters from her, they had just returned from the mountains, fresh and healthy. Yesterday, after receiving the sad telegram we received this accompanying letter. You would appreciate news from her, read the letter and forgive the little maid that she did not write to you herself. Masyiek is her husband and Soemyas is her child.

We have big news for you but that is for next time, now this letter has to be posted straightaway.

Goodbye dearest, warmest regards to your husband and sister from us and a firm kiss from my sister and your

K

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

11 October 1902

Postcard

Dearest,

Together with this I am sending you, signed as documents, the article that Mijnheer had asked me to write and a packet of photographs and sketches.[312] The photo of the carvings belongs to the article and if you like, you can also use the sketches done by R. The large sketch is of the portrait stand. I am sending it to you to give you a clearer idea of it – if you like it then I will get it back from you quickly, won't I, so it can be reproduced by our clever artists? The original piece of yours is just like it, isn't it? It will really be very beautiful. But no one else but you may have it, understood?

Also I would very much like to have returned the photos of our little sister. We are sending them to you because you may like to see our sisters again. It is a pity it is not a very good picture of the children. In the large photograph our sisters looks very well, that is the way she appeared just a few months ago, now she has lost weight. Her husband does not appear in a very flattering light. He is a little man, our sister is taller. Sis is once again ill, you know that.

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312 This is clearly a reference to Kartini's article 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje', published in *Eigen Haard* in January the following year together with the photographs but minus the sketches.

If you consider the article unsuitable then just throw it in the fire. I really will not cry over it and will try to write another. Be honest, you really will not hurt me.

Goodbye, lots of love from us two
K

To Stella Zeehandelaar

11 October 1902

Oh, you can't know how flattered I feel that the artistic products of our country are recognized and appreciated.[313] Sometimes it concerns me to think there might be no one to continue our work when we are no longer here. We cannot give the responsibility to our sisters: they are still too young, and there is a financial responsibility attached to it. I fear that they would then often have to contribute to the expenses from their own resources. Should a European establish here to become involved in this work then undoubtedly it would be the case that our artists will be exploited in the interests of his business. He would not be here for his pleasure, nor in the interests of those artists, the Javanese, when playing the part as intermediary between artists and the market. To undertake this work in a disinterested way as well as effectively, a person must have a love for the art and a love for the Javanese in his heart. Fortunately Oost en West has now taken an interest in this work, but even that Association needs to have someone here because it cannot directly communicate with these people since they can only speak and read their own language.[314]

* * * *

We had always known that being a pioneer would be neither child's play, nor enjoyable, also that it would be a bitter experience but that it would be a living hell … no, Stella, that we did not anticipate. But, oh, a thousand times rather that that Hell is inside us than to have no feeling! Everything that is different must be cut down, everything that shines is regarded as dangerous and contagious! Throughout history, idealists have always had a hard time maintaining their position. The world cannot accept that there are some people who are different to the common herd. And someone who is different from

313 This is a further reference to the craft exhibition organized by Oost en West.

314 This was an astute assessment of the situation. Kartini's crucial role as 'agent' for Oost en West was taken over by Roekmini after Kartini married and later still by Kartinah.

others will be persecuted for the rest of his life and forced to cast aside his own dress and wear the dress of normality instead.

* * * *

I cannot promise you anything, Stella, nor want to, because I do not know if I will be able to keep my promise. Do you really consider Mojowarno so terrible? What would you prefer, that we go mad here at home, or that we find a cure for our wounded soul in that charitable environment? This will be the choice we are driven to, if our desires are not met, if we continue to be imprisoned, cloistered by petty-mindedness and mean-spiritedness. We are much too passionate by nature to be able to accept a situation that we abominate with heart and soul. It is not the foreign enemy that paralyses us, that we do not fear, but it is the internal one that tears at our soul, our heart, our brain! Nothing can comfort us, no one can help us, only God and ourselves!

Please, tell me, that you will not be too disappointed, too desperately sad, if you receive a letter from me telling you to address your letters to Mojowarno. At least, give us that comfort, Stella. Please, even if it has to be reluctantly, let it not be with a bleeding heart. Give us leave to go to Mojowarno. That place does not have any interest for us. We are utterly convinced that the atmosphere there of noble, pure, resigned love will heal the wounds of our heart and soul, and purify us. That we would come there with torn hearts and deeply wounded souls is without question but Mojowarno itself would not in the least be the cause of that. And neither in this case will everything have been lost, Stella!

You, yourself, have so often pointed out my ability with a pen. I will still have that at Mojowarno. Because there I will have nothing to lose and nothing to risk but myself. Here, if I expressed everything which boils inside me, I would put much at risk. Should I become an educator, then the condition of my success is that people trust me and respect me, otherwise they would not entrust their children to me for their education. And that they would not if I expressed publicly everything I think and feel: that would only set the people against me.[315] And as I have already told you, we would, could, only come to Mojowarno with a torn heart and a deeply wounded soul. You know what that would do for my pen?

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315 This lengthy plea to Stella evidently expresses a mood of depression and doubt as to whether her plans to study would eventuate, which is revealed in the following letter to Rosa Abendanon. Importantly it expresses Kartini's 'bottom line': what was important for her was to be a writer in the interests of educating her people and to do so effectively required that she retain her potential readers' trust.

Nothing speaks so strongly to the heart as tears of blood. Recent events have once again shown and made clear to me that I can inspire with my pen … if I dip it in tears of blood. I have made hearts tremble with emotion, made eyes moist.

You know me too well, I hope, that you think it is conceit when I tell you this. My aim is only to make clear to you how the value of writing is increased if blood is used for ink. Just a few months ago, someone totally unknown to me wept on reading some words of mine. She felt how my soul was tearing and my heart breaking as the words flowed from my pen. It moved her so much that she immediately made efforts to do something to rescue the situation! The very next day she came to us to offer a solution that unfortunately came to nothing several days later in the cool light of reason.

Perhaps people think they are doing me a pleasure by assuring me constantly that I write 'beautifully'. What good is that to me? I want my writing to have a lasting impact, Stella, and meaning can only be gained by digging deeply. My heart, my soul, must be excavated and if then a fountain of blood spurts up, only then will it have lasting meaning. It is wretched, but true.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

12 October 1902

Strictly Confidential

Dearest,

The old business has started again, that problem of hesitating and backsliding. That internal battle has broken out again. We saw it coming but, oh, we foolish children continued to believe and trust, we wanted it so much! Mama has been on a trip and, as could have been anticipated, gossip reaches her ears from all sides. Stupid us, we believed and trusted so completely – oh, our hearts are growing colder by the day and our spirit is being blunted.

How shall I begin to tell you this sad tale? It began when Ma returned home from Tegal. One evening after dinner while we were still sitting at the table, I noticed that Ma was backsliding. And immediately the blood started to boil in this hot head. We spoke quite frankly, which ended with Ma getting up from the table and leaving the room. A day later we returned to the subject - and Ma told us. She had met a clairvoyant, had sought his advice about our plans and received this answer: 'It will lead to the ruin of the entire family and of ourselves if we go to Holland.'

Ma received a scolding because she and Father had allowed matters to proceed thus far. 'Do not let the child continue thinking about going to Holland. If she should still go, great difficulties will result. If she does not go but continues to think about it then the child will develop consumption.' (We are quite prepared to believe it.)

Ma attaches great significance to the pronouncements of clairvoyants and occultists. When we heard of a renowned clairvoyant we asked Ma to consult him, really more to put her at rest than for ourselves. And then we wanted to experiment immediately, investigate for ourselves how good this fortune teller was. That we were disappointed you can imagine but we also did not allow ourselves to be unnerved by it. We wanted to find out more about it. Other pronouncements of his were strikingly accurate and his predictions worked out exactly. For instance amongst other things he said that we would be visited by 3 strangers. We knew we would receive a visit but only from 1 person. And truly, he arrived here with two others. How could that man have known this? Ma said: 'What people are saying about you does not worry me but where, time after time, the predictions of this man come true I am afraid.'

I replied: 'There is no God but God. We say that we trust in God and that is what we will maintain. We want to serve God and not people. If we listen to people then we worship people and not God.'

'Ni, you are clever.' And Ma left us.

On another occasion we asked Ma if we could consult the clairvoyant ourselves. We wanted to investigate since Ma attached such significance to his words. You may find it ridiculous, laughable and perhaps you expected that we were above that sort of nonsense. We would gladly have this 'nonsense' explained. How could this man, who has never seen us, know precisely what we looked like? He had described both our appearance and character. We wanted to see, hear, know for ourselves.

Last month we had a meeting with him. He asked our names and said great good fortune awaited us. But what good fortune can a woman expect? She receives her good fortune from a man.

And now listen well to these most remarkable words from the mouth of a Native:[316]

> Tetapi, raden Ayu musto ingat, tida pangkat besar, asal tingi nyang bias bikin seneng atinya RA punya anak. Pangkat besar, asal tingi, kalooh

[316] Presumably this was spoken in Javanese but Kartini writes it in Malay, assuming that Rosa Abendanon had a command of Malay. Old spelling has been modified, but words used are original and thus may no longer equate with modern usage.

atinya tida baik, tida cocok sama atinya RA punya ana temtu tida bias jadi baik.[317]

Mother said: 'Anak, anak mau pigi do Blanda.[318]

Kerja apa then RA? Mau sekolah? RA can sudah sekolah, itu sudah cukup? Kerja di bikin cari kauntungan. Kalau orang Prampuan. Kauntungannya orang prampuan dapat dri orang lelaki, pegang rumah tanga sendiri. Negeri Belanda bukan negrinay orang Islam, temtu RA kalau disana sa ari atinya mensesel. Orang tuwa atinya menesel inget inget anak dijauh. RA atinya menesel inget inget nyang ada di sini, sudah bagitu saja.[319]

Mama: 'Ada sobat nyang mau tulung.'[320]

Sobatnya RA nyinya Blandam jadi lain bangsa. Ya, masih jauh suratnya lebih manis "aku cinta, aku kangen".[321] (There really is someone who has often written that to me. How could he know that. No one else but R and I know it.) RA liat saja, kalau sudah kumpul, belum satu bulan sudah manjadi tidak baik, Kalau RA ada di Blanda, disini ada orang nyang mau mintak, dengan kalu RA ada di Blanda, temtu kumbali, tida brani taku.[322]

We said nothing and just stared fixedly at him.[323] He turned to Ma: 'Raden Ayu, anak dua ini maunya kras, besar!'[324] We were disappointed. 'Are you a

317 Translation: But Raden Ayu must remember that neither high position nor high birth will make her child happy. High class and high birth, if not coupled with a good heart, will not suit the nature of her child nor of course have good consequences.

318 Translation: My child, my child wants to go to Holland.

319 Translation: What would she be doing Raden Ayu? Does she want to go to school? Has RA's daughter not already been to school? That is enough. In the case of a man, education serves to bring fortune. But for a woman? The good fortune of a woman is obtained through the man, by directing his household. Holland is not an Islamic country, every day she is there the RA's daughter will have regrets. The parents will be sorrowful and will be constantly thinking of their child who is so far away. RA's daughter will have remorse and constantly think of those who are here. That is how it will be.

320 Translation: There is a lady friend who will help.

321 Translation: The friend of RA's daughter is a Dutch lady, thus of a different race. Yes, while she is far away, her letters are more than friendly – "I am fond of you, I long for you".

322 Translation: RA will see when they are together, before the end of the month their relationship will no longer be good. Imagine RA's daughter is in Holland and someone here asks for her hand in marriage, then if your daughter is in Holland he will naturally turn back, not dare, be afraid.

323 That Kartini quotes this significant exchange at length would indicate the importance it did have for her and was possibly being used to indirectly let Rosa know of the changes that were beginning to emerge in her perspective.

324 Translation: Raden Ayu, these two children have a strong will, a very strong will.

clairvoyant?' we thought to ourselves. What he then said about other people surprised us again. About Kartono he said:

> Itu anak pinter sekali, samua pekerjaan dia bias. Pinter sekali. Saya kira tida lama jia tingal d Blanda and kalau dia kumbali di Jawa mendapet untung besaar. Tetapi sekarnag dia kliatan masih seneng and krasan di Blanda.[325]

Ma asked him about an acquaintance and we were astounded: 'O, itu nonna, suda duduk tunangan, terlepas lagi. Suda tiga kali dia di mintah orang.'[326]

We did not leave it at that but wanted to know more from this interesting man. We told our brother and sister-in-law our plans, outlined the whole situation and asked them if they were sympathetic to it, to support us. And then we heard from our sister-in-law an entirely different interpretation of Ma's first meeting with the clairvoyant than Mama's account of it. When Ma asked about us he first described our appearance and then our character and said:

> Ana dua nyang tuwa itu satu ati. Kepikiranya dan maunya sama. Sa ari ari sudah tida ada lagi nyang di piker cuma kapinteran. Aneh sekali maunya anak dua itu, mau menjadi pendita. Kepikirannya sudah tida brenti nya. Ari malam dia cuma inget mau pigi Blanda dia cuma tunga permissinya orang tuwanya. Besar, kras maunya anak berdua itu. Dia sudah pasrah sama Allah tak Allah.[327]

It seemed like magic, how could that man know all this? Neither my brother nor my sister-in-law knew of it and we were at home in Jepara. About R. he also said she was a little quiet but that her will was as great as mine.

As we expected Ma, made afraid by all sorts of stories and rumours, had called on his assistance – to work against us, to destroy our will and in its place to encourage an expectation for a normal woman's good fortune. He said that would be very difficult because our will was so strong and that we had no such

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325 Translation: This child is very intelligent, he can do anything. He is really very intelligent. I believe he will not stay long in Holland and when he returns to Java he will have much good fortune. But at the moment it seems that he is still enjoying himself and feels at home in Holland.

326 Translation: Oh, that girl is already engaged but that has been broken off again. She has already been asked three times in marriage.

327 Translation: The oldest children are of one mind. Their thoughts and their will are the same. Each day they think of nothing but their development. The will of these two children is most remarkable, they want to be priestesses. Their thoughts just continue. Night and day they think of nothing else than wanting to go to Holland, they await merely the permission of their parents. Strong, extremely strong is the will of these two children. They have completely given themselves over to Allah.

desire at all and no such thoughts in us. Later, when we had returned from Holland our hearts would beat but not now.

Ma insisted that he should try and asked him to give us 'jimats' (amulets). This he firmly refused saying: 'Tida beguna anak dua itu di kasih jumat, pecuma saja sabab maunya kras sekali, serta dia sudah pasrah sama Allah tak Allah.'[328]

Ma insisted and he continued resolutely to refuse to give us jimats but he promised Ma to do what he could to accede to Ma's other wishes so that our going to Holland would not take place. And on Ma's urgent request that evening he spoke to us through Ma's spirit. But you will have noticed that he nevertheless remained true to himself, that is to say, he said nothing more than he could guarantee. And he must then have been thoroughly convinced of the unusualness (the difference from others) of our characters that he, as a strict believer, a pious person, raised and bred in the belief that marriage is a matter in which the woman has totally no say, and that fortune means rank, riches, respect and birthright, nevertheless wanted to suggest that in our case one should not consider rank and birth but only the heart. If the heart did not coincide with our aims then there would be a problem. So he acknowledged in our case the right to have a say in such arrangements.

Do you not think this is remarkable coming from a Native who, as I have told you, is a very pious and a strict religious person? My brother asked him after Ma had left what he thought – will we go or not – and he said: 'Saya kira Raden Mas, saya memuju ini tida beguna. RM punya sudara rupanya menjadi pigi.'[329]

'Pigi mana?'[330]

He replied: 'Tida ada alangan apa-apa. Maunya baik, menjadinya juga baik. Pigi, dating slamet, tida ada alangan apa. Cuma RM punya orang tuwa, susah sekali. Dia cinta sekali sama anaknya duwa itu. Dian yang bikin brat jalnya anak, sabab dia tida eklas.'[331]

Aside from his 'good journey and safe return' do you not find his pronouncements correct? Our parents are making our path difficult. He accuses

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328 Translation: It is no use giving these children an amulet, it is really no use because their will is so strong and because they have completely given themselves to Allah.

329 Translation: I think, Raden Mas, if I should recommend this, it would have no sense. RM has sisters who obviously will be going anyway.

330 Translation: Going where?

331 Translation: There is no obstacle. If their intentions are good, the result will also be good. They will have a pleasant journey and a safe return. Only RM's parents will worry. They love their children very much. The departure of their children will weigh heavily upon them because they cannot accept it.

mother of faint-heartedness: 'Buwang RA pikiran yang tida musti. RA bikin susah atinya sendiri. Pasrah saya same Allah tak Allah.'[332] This is exactly our thought. We instructed our brother and sister to tell and explain to this man everything about us. In short, we asked for their help. We wished that our parents had more courage, that they were brave and that they dared. Ma attaches great significance to his pronouncements. Both brother and sister promised to help and support us.

Oh yes, and just this as well: when we went that evening to visit the Resident my brother went to the clairvoyant on his own initiative and asked how the Resident would behave towards us. 'The Resident has not changed in his attitude towards your parents and sisters but the ladies cannot stomach your sisters, often speak unkindly about them and the Resident says nothing, just listens but does not think any more about it. 'Ini nanti KTR bolehnya mentrima. RM punya sudara baiknya lebih dari biasa.'[333]

And that is the way it was. How the ladies behave towards us I have already written to you. Amazing, don't you think? About Oetoyo when he had completed his BS and was appointed as controleur's clerk he had predicted: 'Kalau RM Oetoyo besok tidak menjadi orang besar, saya punya kuping boleh di potong.'[334] Oetoyo is now Regent of Ngawi – who would have dared think it possible then? He is the son of a patih and had no claim to a regent's throne.

And now the really terrible story. Yesterday Ma had me called to her room and gave me a letter from my brother to read. It was one long lament about us two. He began by declaring that we had made him totally unsettled. One day the Assistant Resident had told him that his name had been put forward for two wedono positions but that both applications had been returned because the gentlemen in B[uitenzorg] who decide on these matters were displeased about our plan to go to Holland. These important gentlemen were not at all impressed by our plan and if we go to Holland then he can be responsible for his own future.

After that the Regent of Demak sent a person of rank to visit him to ask him if he had given approval to our plan to go to Holland and my loyal brother told him: 'I do not approve of it at all, in the first place because it is not adat that young Javanese girls go to Holl. and secondly my parents are quite old,

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332 Translation: Why does RA not cast out these inappropriate thoughts. RA makes it difficult for herself. Place yourself entirely in the hands of Allah.

333 Translation: That is the way it will be. The Resident will later give his permission. Your sisters are extraordinarily good.

334 Translation: Have my head if in the future RM Oetoyo does not become an important man. Oetoyo was in fact later regent of Jepara and member of the Volksraad.

and thirdly it is humiliating to go when others are paying for them to learn and live.'

Why should the Regent of D[emak] have sent someone after my brother? Do you think that is noble?

He then went to the clairvoyant to consult about us. The conclusion was 1: 'Both in the Indies and in Holl the important gentlemen are not in favour of our plan.' And 2: 'In Holl. an important person will pay court to us.'

My brother is desperate! We two will be the ruin of everyone. If we go to Holl. then he no longer wants to be priyayi,[335] he wants to become a soldier. Oh!

This was then followed by a sermon from Mama; I said not a word. Ma tried her best to speak in a controlled and quiet voice: 'As you can see from the date Ni, this letter is already several days old. At first we did not want to let you read it because I thought that the boy was trying to delude us that he was trying to keep you from your plan. I wanted to check first if his information was correct. I sent someone to another clairvoyant to see if he had in fact been put forward for these positions and the reply was in the affirmative. Then, about how the important gentlemen in the Indies and Holland thought about us, that was also affirmed. They had all had a change of mind. To tell you the truth neither Father nor I can happily see you leave unless it is to your own home. Do you know that it is to do something without the blessing of your parents or the blessing of your older brothers and sisters? No one can put out the fire inside you but yourself. Have you no sympathy for your parents, for your brothers and sisters? Do you feel nothing for their suffering? Yu Jing is expecting a child and grieves for you night and day. Cuwick grieves about you – everyone grieves about you.'

'We can do nothing about this. We cannot help it that you and they all have such soft hearts.'

'No you cannot help that but you are our child and their sister and we can do nothing but suffer with you if you suffer.'

At this point my blood reached boiling point. She, empathizing with our suffering? Have they ever had any sympathy for us? Yes, they are sad, sorrowful, where their interests are involved. And, oh, their idol, the people! It was on the tip of my tongue to say it but with an effort I forced it back. Instead I said: 'Mama I cannot help it that you all fear the people.'

'We are only people.'

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335 This suggests that he could not remain a member of the prestigious Javanese civil service in the face of such a scandal.

'We are also only people and have never suggested otherwise.' And after a while: 'So, all of you do not want us to go to Holland? Then we will not go to Holland.'

Ma looked delighted: 'Do you mean it?'

'I mean it. We will, in accordance with the wishes of all of you, not go to Holland – we are going to France, to Paris. The Governments in the Indies and Holland will have nothing to do with it. All of you do not have to worry that we will be flirting with Europeans or engaging in a bad life because we will be staying with pious women priestesses who will look after us like mothers.'

Ma was devastated. She had not anticipated such a turn of events, nor had we. Ma requested us not to talk about it immediately. 'Wherever you might be going, if it is not to follow a man then we will always remain uneasy.'

Again my eyes sparkled. Oh God, my God, will we be forever plagued by that? Fortunately we have the firm conviction that no man will ever think of us. We are too well known, 'infamous', that we will ever have to fear anything like that. I said nothing more.

Do you know that it was reported in the paper that we would soon be going to Holl., R. to go to a drawing academy and I to a domestic economy school in order to establish later such a school for the daughters of Native rulers? Who would have done this? Only a few people know of our plans and we can rely on them. In one of the papers it even said apparently that we were leaving for Europe in the care of the O[vink] family. What nonsense. Who in God's name has been gossiping? We are getting letter after letter wishing us a good journey. We do not know and will not think about it only hope: that it may soon become a reality.

Do you understand in what kind of atmosphere we exist? That letter from my brother was dated 30 Sept. – his last letter to me was 22 Sept. and had ended with the promise to support us! Poor thing, a weakling. We are not at all angry with him, merely commiserate with him with all our heart. We would now like to go to Holl. to savour the delight of admiring him with heart and soul. If he became a soldier we would admire him with heart and soul!

On the second of this month I received a letter from my sister-in-law who in some ways gave me a different interpretation of what the clairvoyant had said: 'He knows and has understood everything we want to do. What you want is fine, is good; your thoughts and opinions are pure and principled. What troubles him are your parents, their hearts will be shattered if you went. And then, most of the important gentlemen in Holland and the Indies are not in favour of your plans. As regards yourselves, your departure, return and so on,

all will go well. He is only concerned about those who will stay behind, in the first place your parents and after that, the rest of your family. And then, what if there should be an accident? Then we will all be unhappy. Please, do not do it, while it has not yet happened.'

We can well believe that most of the big names do not approve of our plans since it is a social democrat, the declared opponent, enemy of capitalism, who is pleading our case at the Binnenhof.[336] We can work that out for ourselves. And their prejudice will not be diminished if they got to know us personally because, while born into an aristocratic family we are democrats to the backbone, long before we ever dreamt that we would make the acquaintance of the van Kol family.

Oh, what idiots we have been. How could we have seriously expected help from our poor brothers and sisters! And why did they promise to help? In this affair men of standing, respect and influence are involved. They might be able to use the sisters as ladders to realize their pathetic ideals. Oh, please, tell us why they all long to become Regent. Is it to have a greater opportunity to be of service to the country and its people? Is it to be in a better position to achieve something grand and good? Status, swank and sparkle - that is their socially uplifting ideal! And to that we must be sacrificed? To satisfy a petty-minded public we will have to be sacrificed? One's greatest possession – one's conscience – is to be offered up to public opinion. We fear we are in a web of intrigue. We hope shortly to have the opportunity to speak with the Resident. We do not believe he has told his mother and sister about my letter otherwise the ladies would have been so kind to have brought this to Ma's attention. This we do appreciate in him, he at least honours the trust of a young girl.

What role does the Regent of Demak play in all this? Oh no, in the dust all those who will not bow before H[is] M[ajesty]. But he knows that we will not bow to him. You should have seen in what a benign, humble and friendly manner he looked at me during the wedding here. He thought we would lie with our face on the ground. The friendly look became sterner and sterner when we continued standing, instead of putting our faces on the ground.[337] And we preferred to stand and sit with the Resident. We paid no attention to

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336 Binnenhof is a reference to the Dutch government. Significantly Kartini makes no attempt to differentiate Abendanon from this criticism which presumably was intended to refer to the immediate advisers of the governor general, the Council of the Indies.

337 As Kartini had explained in letters to Stella, formal ritual for honouring elders had been strictly maintained in the extended family.

people, did not think of them but about entirely different things, as I recently wrote to you.

At the meeting when our little sister gave the bridegroom the symbolic kiss everyone kneeled. Regents, Raden Ayus, all were on the ground, only we two had straight knees, stood out like beacons above the crawling mass. Accidently our gaze happened to fall on the RA of Demak; she saw us and smiled but apart from that we saw nothing. We looked across the sea of heads below us to the far horizon where the sun was just sitting. We thought about our distant loved one, of his shattered heart and that there was no one of us there to support him.[338] Dear true comrade. Our friendship, our love is being put to the test. He was broken when on 11 Dec. he received our letter of November in which I had brought him up to date with what was happening here.

It was just the evening before the wedding that we received his reply: 'First for Nil' was written on the top. 'Do not despair, there is hope of rescue.' Dear, dependable boy. He told us how he had been paralyzed by my cry of despair. Night brought him neither comfort nor solutions. The next morning his instinct drove him with my desperate letter in his pocket to Heer van der Wijck, the former G.G. He succeeded in gaining his sympathy; Heer v.d.W. was only sorry that he had not written earlier. He would write to Father about it. How could I have known that I had been nicely led up the garden path. The ninnies had been so completely trusting. The following morning brother went there again and also met his wife who informed him that they should find something magnificent that they could offer the parents in place of a marriage and she thought she had found something. We should come to Holland.[339]

And she continued to explain that, at her suggestion, influential people, most from the court, had become interested and were ready to get together a sum of money to enable us to come to H. in order for us to study there till we had mastered a vocation which would enable us to earn a living. She mentioned the names of people, well-known men at court. Her husband and she would stand guarantee that we would be looked after in H. and that we would lack for nothing. She was so moved that she simply wept. She would interest the Queen in our plight.

'Come, everyone awaits you with open arms.' We had remained cold and cool in those days but after we had read that letter our eyes filled with tears

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338 The reference is to her brother, Kartono in the Netherlands.

339 It should be noted that these arrangements were being made without the knowledge of Rosa until detailed in a letter in July. The Abendanons had assumed she was intending to train as a teacher in Batavia.

and a sob arose in our throat. Too late! The time had passed.[340] And we could look at our sister without emotion – the letter from Mas To had once again broken our heart.

'Too late, the time has passed!'– it kept ringing in my ears. It was our dear brother who we were thinking of when we spoke with the R. That was the solution which had been offered us. All that was necessary was the total approval of our Parents. And that is what we wanted to achieve through the intervention of the R. I said not a word about the outcome itself. Father and Mother needed to know what the R. had suggested to us. Fortunately I had not written to you about the outcome. Later indeed, Heer v.d.W. had disapproved of his wife's plan, in other words the promised help was withdrawn. We were only sad for our brother, not for ourselves. We could very well understand that these intelligent people after calm reflection felt inclined to stand between our parents and their children. It is sin, is it not? For one moment they had allowed themselves to be dragged along by their emotions, to share our suffering, and for that we were grateful to them. How powerful the pen can be if it is dipped in blood. People think they are doing me a pleasure in assuring me that I write well! Still it was nice of Mev. v.d.W. to immediately set about organizing something even though it later turned out to be a dead duck. It belongs to the best moments of my life, that of being completely taken up in another's inner life completely inside the feelings of the other. She is totally unknown to me personally.

Mas To occasionally visits them and recently he was there again and partook of a midday meal. The v.d.W family asked after us, they especially wanted to know about our younger sister. Mas To brought a son of Paku Alam with him to visit them.[341] This young fellow has already been in H. for 11 years and still knows no one. Nice isn't it that all the countrymen come to my brother.

Mas To has not allowed himself to be disheartened by the many disappointments he has had but has continued busying himself to uncover new avenues for his young sisters. He did not want to tell us anything about his plans to avoid possible disappointment. His latest letter was like a message from heaven. Its timing was so opportune and concerned the great news which I had wanted to tell you and with which I treated Mama yesterday. I will transcribe a portion of it:

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340 It was too late in the sense that the initial plan had been for the three sisters to go to the Netherlands.

341 This reference is probably to Raden Mas Ario Soortio, a son of Paku Alam VI of Yogyakarta who seems to have arrived in the Netherlands in the early 1890s for his secondary schooling (Poeze 1986: 39).

> I hope for both your sakes that the Government will give a scholarship to enable you to study in Holland. If by mischance that whole plan should fail then, through an influential acquaintance of mine in Paris, a lady, I have managed to ensure that you would be accepted, at no cost, into one of the leading convents in Paris. Your journey would be paid for by the convent. It is very influential convent: the French Government has not dared to close it. The education under the direction of the sisters is perfect. In my opinion you could prepare yourself for the task you have in mind just as well in Paris as in Holland. And as far as the arts and music are concerned, Paris is extremely rich in this regard. This lady, Mev. Palmer assures me that you will lack in nothing there, they will look after you as mothers. This is of course a last resort, you understand that, don't you. But it is nevertheless a good idea to prepare Father and Mother for this possibility. I have also obtained other sources of assistance, all outside Holland, through the intervention of influential foreign acquaintances, but this one appear to me to be the best. Think this over and write to me about it. I definitely do not want to take away your hopes for the success of the attempts by Heer v. Kol. I thought it was a good idea to prepare against all eventualities, don't you agree?

Just imagine, to Paris! It is precisely as Mas To says, a last resort. A message from heaven, just in these days. Do not talk about it with anyone. If we have to go there we will be safeguarded against anger and jealousy, they will not be able to touch us there, neither the Indies nor Holland has anything to do with it. It is only painful for us but that is nothing, it will go away. That Father has a son in Holl. is bad enough but Father is not the first Javanese who has a son in Europe. But it would be too bad if Father also had daughters in Holl. and he would be constantly reminded that we were there on someone else's costs. Everything associated with the name Sosroningrat must be brought down. It is already a great crime that Father dared not to have ordinary children. That is already a great sin without the second, that those children have brains.

Oh, how they trumpeted when Mas To did not do well in Holl. But we have the wonderful, strong and secure feeling that Mas To will make up what he has ruined.[342]

How they praised him when he was preparing to leave! We told the informant here he suggested the means whereby he would achieve a marvellous career: that he must return to the family!

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[342] Kartono continued to have a problematic university career as documented in the letters of his sisters. See Coté 2008.

It has now become apparent who first correctly recognized the qualities of sister's husband! Our parents have little courage but that they would not do![343]

When you later come to Europe and Mas To is still there then he must visit you. He must know both of you and you him. He is such a dear, true-hearted boy. When he has completed his studies he can go wherever he wishes, he does not have to go to the Indies if he does not want to. Father is leaving him completely free in this matter.[344] Still, were I to come into this world again and I was given a choice then I would again want to come as a woman.

Don't you think it dear and loyal of him that he so completely shares our concerns and is constantly on our side? His love, his loyalty is moving. We think about him so much. If we are desperate then the thought of him brings such relief to our confused brain. That his letter should arrive just at this time! There is an omnipotent, provident Father who directs our paths, there is a Father of love! Everyone is against Holland, fears the displeasure of the Dutch Government men. Holl. has nothing to do with Paris.

You understand of course we are not really serious about giving up Holland, that we are still hoping to go there. I talked about Paris to Mama to show her our new weapon. We do not have to tell Father as we received the letter from her. If it becomes too difficult for us there then we will go there. What will they think now? They cannot accuse us of ruining their career. They are worried about our best interests! How noble! If their own interests are involved, if the people talk … yes, we readily believe that their poor hearts are broken! What do they feel about our suffering? Our tortured heart? Our thwarted soul?

'No,' said Ma, 'iron is strong yet it allows itself to be bent and you, a human being, will not bend.' 'What then are you? You have no heart.'

No, thank God, no, I have no heart which seeks only itself, that is constantly thinking about its own advantage and wellbeing, that seeks out the exalted ideal of glamour and sparkle, that trembles and shakes before the people!

I taunted them to prove that we were bad, that our desires, our intentions are bad. If they can prove that, then we will bend. But as long as egotism and the fear of the people control them, we will not listen to them. Are we looking after ourselves? Are we really looking to our own advantage? Oh, it makes my blood boil, to think what our beautiful young lives have to be sacrificed to: fear of people and self-interest.

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343 What Kartini is alluding to in these two cryptic comments is not made clear.

344 Kartono stayed in Europe after he completed his studies until 1925 pursuing an active career as journalist for a number of foreign newspapers and reporting, amongst other things, on World War I and the League of Nations.

Throw us out, disown us! You fear that after we have been in Holl. we will float between heaven and earth. Do you know where we are now?

Do you know what attraction Mojowarno has for us? That there we will have nothing more to do with the world for which, with every breath, we inhale distaste. What a pleasure it would be to have nothing more to do with that world, to be dead as far as society is concerned. Oh, often in us there cries out a longing for those simple souls. We will not rail against their simplicity, we will not teach them more needs: we will leave them in their simplicity, their character, and only attempt to introduce change where their customs are in conflict with the principle of Love.[345]

Do you consider Mojowarno so terrible seen from that perspective? What is worse: Mojowarno, the Paris convent or to be prepared here for Buitenzorg, or the saddest thing a person can do – to lay a violent hand on oneself? We realize only too well that you would find that terrible but if nothing else is possible, do give us over to that life with goodwill. We know that it is of no consequence to you in what surroundings we may end up in, that we will remain the same to you even if we are in disgrace. You only feel how difficult it would be for us.[346]

We think a lot about Dr Adriani in Pantas.[347]

You know what we would very much like to know? How this will all end. Where will we find our grave?

Mama said: 'Years ago there was also a Regent's daughter whose name was on everyone's lips. She was one of the first who had received a European education. The reports about her abilities swept across the whole of Java. And the end result was that she died with a bad reputation. Did Mama equate us with that poor creature who knew of no other means of expressing her higher culture than to dress herself in European clothes? Did we ever go to bathe or what have you accompanied by guards? Mama certainly is very friendly!

Why do people care for us? We feed an expensive seedling: vanity. People are proud of the few brains that we have. They can show off with it. We would almost regret having a few brains if all they did was to feed vanity.

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345 Kartini's comment here may reflect the views of Adriani (mentioned a little later) who, together with his colleague Albert Kruyt, claimed that their mission in Central Sulawesi was not to change Pamona culture but merely to modify certain traditions (for instance headhunting) which conflicted with the 'norms' of civilized Christian society and to improve their material life in contrast to traditional mission practice.

346 Kartini quickly corrects the impression that she may have created that Rosa and Jacques Abendanon would have negative feelings about her committing to work in such a lowly capacity (as a nurse) and perhaps also in a Christian centre.

347 Pantas was a village in Central Sulawesi where Adriani supervised a mission school and recorded Pamona oral literature.

We have believed, we have trusted, we have been patient, we have been sweet. How have we been rewarded? Do you understand how with each day our hearts are further chilled? We so want to love, we would so gladly trust!

For a year already I have heard something about myself that saddens me. I am a coquet. Do not spare me, tell me honestly: am I coquet? And if so, in what way then. I am very miserable about it because I want nothing associated with me that is frivolous. Someone, not a scandalmonger, says that I speak with my eyes. Is that true? I asked sister to attend carefully to my actions and habits and to tell me if she notices anything of significance, to see whether there is anything in what they say. And sister, who always speaks the truth, says she has always known that my eyes sparkle when I speak at length, no matter to whom. Believe me that I do not do that on purpose and that I have never intended, no matter what the circumstance, to set out to please and if I happen to do something which is interpreted in this way, it is unconscious, despite myself. It is a strange realization when one has always thought of oneself as a serious, solid young girl to suddenly hear that one is a coquettish creature. I was dumbfounded and then very saddened by it.

Do believe me that I have never, never thought about such things and shall never do so. It is required that I politely (hypocritically) lower my eyes but that I will not do. I want to look them in their eyes not lower my eyes before them, in order not to look at their eyes.[348] I know what they will make us promise, perhaps even on oath, if we leave here: that we will not perpetrate the dreadful scandal of sharing health and hearth with a European. They can breathe easy on that score.[349] Of ourselves we would not think of it. Indeed we would ruin everything if we did. We would not allow ourselves, we who wish to be a model of what is good.

You know how very little we care about what 'people' say, but in this instance it must never be said: 'There, you see where it leads? If you educate your daughters in a European fashion then they will marry Europeans.' That would do untold damage to our project and that must not be. And yet we do nothing else but share our lives with Europeans. What am I doing at the moment? Do not Europeans live our deepest feelings with us? Share our deepest secrets? And do we not share the inner lives of Europeans?

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348 Not looking in the face of a person of higher status was an element of Javanese etiquette.

349 Kartini is referring to the European male practice of maintaining a Javanese njai or concubine. The practice was a key element in turn-of-the-century criticism of colonial society, most dramatically recounted in a book by Bas Veth, *Het Leven in Nederlandsch-Indië* (1900) that Kartini had perhaps read but more likely read about.

From 'people' we have already had to hear so much pleasantry. The latest discovery is: 'Give them the 'one thing necessary' and they will leave everything else behind.' People comment on everything. So for instance they could not bear it that my sister and I walked hand-in-hand or sat next to each other and held hands. How sickening!

Much, even everything can be taken from us but not my pen. That remains mine and I shall practise diligently to handle that weapon! Let us not be taunted too much, even the most dogged patience can be exhausted and then we will make use of that weapon even though we will wound ourselves with it. You can be certain that when we are in Mojowarno we will make good use of it. Then we will have nothing more to loose or to offer but ourselves. We promise we will lift the curtain and show what lies behind the screen. The viper's nest will not be suppressed too quickly or easily.

We do not need to tell you, do we, that in these days we long even more for the heart of a friend? We have grown cold, we want to warm our chilled hearts against your heart, your love. We complain about the egotism of others but then what of ours? The greatest egotists! Is it not pure egotism to make others share in one's pain and smarting? To ask for love even though we know that for us love is inseparable from suffering? Do you not think that we are regressing? Are hard? Have become loveless and sharp? Oh, it frightens us sometimes.

All this tells us that we must not stay longer where we are if we are not to continue going backwards. Oh God! Oh God! I have to say it, it is becoming heavier and more difficult with each day to continue or, more accurately, to survive in this unsettled atmosphere. Do you believe now that we are regressing, that we have become hard, loveless?

Oh God give us the energy, strength, support us! And you, dearest, I ask forgiveness for the suffering I have caused you with this letter. Silence is also not good, not honest. Forgive me, love your brown children.

Goodbye dearest.

Your
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

27 October 1902

My dear, kind Moedertje,

Sincerest thanks for your deeply felt letter which has done so much good on the one hand but brought us sorrow on the other. It gives us so much pain

when we hear you are experiencing grief. What an inconsistency coming from us who so often cause you sorrow – evidence again our last letter.

How are you dearest? Have you recovered, my dearest moedertje? We hope so with all our heart. Oh, if we would tell you what a feeling overcomes us each time we received tokens of your deep love for us. In all our wretchedness we yet consider ourselves privileged beings. There are so many, oh so many poor people, in much worse circumstances than ours who, with neither friend nor family, have to struggle through this difficult life alone, never hearing a kind, compassionate word, never receiving a sympathetic glance, a warm handshake. We consider ourselves richly blessed in possessing a friendship, a love, such as yours. Continue to love us and believe in us forever, Moedertje, that is how you will make us happy. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your love and sympathy.

You see that we have already somewhat recovered: we were waiting for this in order to be able to reply to your last letter which we have taken into our hearts and will safeguard like a sacred relic.

What a difference there is between your concern about our eventual departure to Europe and that of our people. You are considering our happiness and they are considering theirs! Oh please, we plead and beg you, do not be so concerned about our happiness; we have so often told you we are not seeking our happiness but that of others.

Believe us, we expect nothing from Europe nor from our future laurels for ourselves. We have only one dream, one illusion about Europe: that it will prepare us well for the struggle that we have committed ourselves to, that is for the well-being of our people, our sisters. Truly, we expect nothing, nothing from Europe that the European girls expect, neither joy nor much friendship or sympathy, nor to feel happier in a European environment. We expect and hope just this: to find there that which we need for our goal – knowledge, education. And that is all we are thinking of.

What does it matter whether we like Europe or not, whether we would ever feel at home in a Dutch environment or not, as long as we can obtain there what we need for our purpose? That is the reason we are going there and not to seek our pleasure. The highlight of our stay there will be being with our dearest brother with whom we have close bonds not only by blood but also by affinity of soul and spirit. Truly, we do not expect that the European world will make us happy. The time has long passed when we thought that 'European society was the only true one, the foremost, the unsurpassable one.'[350]

[350] It has not been possible to trace the origin of this quotation if indeed it is a quotation. This statement is however interesting as an indication that Kartini had moved considerably

Forgive us for asking but do you yourself find European society perfect? Oh, we would be the last ones not to acknowledge gratefully the existence of the many, very many good things in your world. But would you deny that beside the very beautiful, the grand and the lofty aspects of your society there is much that often makes a mockery of the name civilization?

We complain about the narrow-mindedness, the pettiness which surrounds us: do not think that in the world which we want to enter to achieve our goals that we do not expect to also find such pettiness. Indeed, perhaps it will be more difficult for us since we would be expecting something different from 'civilized people'. You yourself know better than us that amongst the thousands who society regards as 'civilized' only very few are so in reality; that breadth of vision and conception is by no means possessed by every European of whom it could and should be expected and that even in the most elegant, famous most glittering salons, narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness are not unknown.

We really do not imagine Holland to be an ideal country. On the contrary, going on what we have seen and experienced of Dutchmen here we can be certain that we will see and experience in their small cold country much that will cause us, as sensitive people, pain and which will sorely grieve us.

We Javanese are accused of being born liars, completely unreliable and ingratitude personified. We have not only read this but have also heard it said many times which in itself provided a nice proof of the speaker's sensitivity. We merely smile when we read or hear such sweet expressions and we remind ourselves of the European social life which, oh so often, provides spectacular evidence of that love of truth, of honesty, of many, many of those same Europeans who look down from such heights to mock the totally dishonest, untrustworthy Javanese.

Until a few years ago we had very little contact with Europeans. The first time that we found ourselves in a European environment was at the celebration of the coronation of HM.[351] Oh, how can I describe how moved we were when we came to see for the first time the remarkable lengths to which comedy had developed beyond the stage in European society. It was at this celebration that our earnest respect for Europeans received its fatal stabs! We saw two ladies deep in conversation, arm in arm, intimately leaning against each other, we

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away from the position she expressed in letters to Stella in 1899, presumably the time referred to that had 'long passed'.

351 Kartini would have attended this event, compulsory for all Javanese officials of the region, in the company of her father. The account highlights how Kartini distinguishes her critical assessment of colonial European society from the beneficial aspects of Western culture.

heard an exchange of endearments. Close friends we thought. A gentleman came to separate the two and we heard the chosen one say to him, 'What a cat!' while the one who remained said to another lady: 'That stupid woman, to dress herself in such a ridiculous manner.' Just a moment before she had vehemently declared how this 'dear friend' was so sweetly dressed.

Time and again that evening we were witness to similar and other 'heart-warming' performances. We saw red, heated, male faces, 'gentlemen', who exuded an awful smell of alcohol as they spoke. And oh, all that shouting and clamour in which seeing and hearing disappeared. Our hearts grew cold and yearned to be taken away from these 'civilized' surroundings. Oh, if we were mean and wanted to recount what friends had said of each other a civil war would break out.

Just recently a girl wrote us an enthusiastic letter about a visit she had just paid to a mutual friend, she had been so lovingly and warmly received. Not long afterwards we spoke to this acquaintance, we thanked her for the kind reception of our friend and what reply did we receive? 'I think she is an awful girl. She always has a sour look, is never kind and friendly and is always snappish.'

We have been witness to countless warm embraces between people of whom we knew that they hated each other. And it was not the despised 'nonas' who did this but the whites, of pure blood, civilized and well-educated. We also saw how unsophisticated nonas were made fun of by clever, civilized Dutch people.[352]

The Javanese is a born liar, is utterly unreliable! We let the accusation stand. We only ask: if a child sins in ignorance and an adult, thinking person commits the same sin with deliberation, in a calculated fashion, who of the two is most at fault? We sometimes ask ourselves: 'My God! What then is civilization? Is it …is it mastery …of hypocrisy?' Oh, what are we doing? What have we said? Forgive us Moedertje! You know it is not our intention to offend and insult but that we only want to be open with you. Is not sincerity the basis of our friendship, our love? Often it is not courteous to be honest. If it does not have to be then we prefer not to be uncourteous, we are after all Javanese, one of whose specific character traits is 'courteousness'.

Your light has shown us and has led us to ask: 'What is form without content?' We believe that you have to know what we think of aspects of your society because you seem to think that we consider the European world an

[352] Kartini is referring to the typical distinction made in colonial society between white Europeans and those of mixed European and Javanese descent. The *nona* was the typical target of comic colonial stories.

ideal. What we consider the true ideal you have known for some time and we know you have similar views: true civilization is by no means yet to be found generally in civilized countries. It is possible to find the real thing amongst the peoples whom the mass of the white race, convinced as it is of its own excellence, regards with contempt.

Our people certainly do have faults but, beside that, also virtues, examples which the 'civilized people' can certainly follow. As you can see we are degenerate, otherwise we would surely not say this since it cannot give a good impression of one of the specific character traits of the Javanese people: 'modesty'.

Father said to me once: 'Nil, do not think there are many Europeans who are really fond of you. There are only a few.' Father really did not have to say this, we know this very well ourselves. We can count on our fingers those who have a sincere regard for us and we do not even need two hands for that. Most affect sympathy in order to pose, or as a calculated ploy. If we were to come to stay with you in Batavia and we were received most lovingly, do you think we would not know to whom that kindness was actually being directed? For one or two people perhaps we would be what we are but for the great mass we would be protégés of the Director of E[ducation] and Mev. Abendanon. It is to you they would be paying their respects and it would be you they were flattering.

We have seen this kind of thing before. In this area there was once an Assistant Resident – a baron from an aristocratic family. He took an interest in us and wherever we went people from his district showed us every politeness, especially when he was present. Ridiculous! The best thing to do in such situation is to just see the humorous side of it then one will not be irritated by it. Oh, the people are often so ridiculous and so awfully stupid. Do you not think that very many people now praising Native Art who never stop talking about it, are only doing so to be fashionable and not because they themselves have any interest in it? Several key people are interested in it and then everyone else just follows along. Is it done with conviction? But then, what does it matter as long as the objective of the true friends of the Javanese and of art is thereby realized.

Do you think we do not know why *De Echo* is glad to publish pieces of ours, no matter how insubstantial? It is good publicity for the journal. The *Holl. Lelie* offered to make its columns available to me and requested the previous editor time and time again to publish letters of mine. Why? For the publicity! Letters from a real daughter of the east, from a genuine young Javanese girl, thoughts from one of those half-wild creatures and, moreover, expressed by herself in a European language. Oh how terribly interesting! And if in desperation we give vent to our anguish in Dutch then once again it is deeply 'interesting' and –

God preserve us – if we should die of broken hearts because of our murdered ideal then it would also be, oh so terribly interesting!

Oh but there are people who are interesting and who do find things important!

Still, enough of that. Now about some 'hocus pocus'. A few days after ma had let us read the letter from our oldest brother Ma again approached me: 'Ni,' Ma said softly, 'I have received a letter from your brother. He brought me a message from the clairvoyant which concerns you two. Since you have visited him he feels responsible for your happiness. He so much wants to help you. He now requests that each of you provide him with a kebaya which you have just worn and had not yet been washed.' I said nothing and together with my sister picked up some clothes which had just been sewn and gave these to Ma. She opened the package saw the new clothes and returned them to us: 'That is not what we want, we want clothes you have just worn. Will you do it or not? Just tell me straight out. I am straightforward with you. If I had secretly wanted to take away your clothes I could have done so easily but I did not want to be dishonest.'

'Thank you for your honesty. We will also be honest with you. We would prefer not to.'

Do you know what they want to do with us? To put us under hypnosis. How that will happen, what transformations our clothes will have to endure we do not know but we do know that those clothes, fresh from our bodies have to act as mediums. We recently read in a scientific journal about the transference of a person's feelings to inanimate objects, photographs, a glass of water, items of clothing. This knowledge, considered nonsense by most Europeans, is holy writ for our people. Whether we believe it or not we are not sure; we have never experienced it ourselves. Now we do have the opportunity to experience personally the 'silent power'.[353] While we are very curious about it we prefer not to make ourselves available to be used as an experiment. We think it would be like playing with fire.

That business of being gentle, being straightforward, was on the advice of the clairvoyant. It is known that one should be careful not to treat us roughly otherwise we might become unrestrainable.

Our reply was immediately relayed. Ma does not know that we are aware of the purpose for wanting the clothes. Several days later we saw another letter from our brother arrive. That afternoon we were going for a short trip and coming home we could not find the clothes we had on before we

[353] This is a reference to the novel by Louis Couperus, *De Stille Kracht* (1900).

left. The suspicion suddenly came to us that they had been taken away. We commenced a search and investigation. Ma was still in the bathroom – it became apparent that Moeder had taken them away. We went to her and requested the return of our things. We received no reply. We continued asking, demanding but Moeder did not answer. When finally we became very angry she said she had taken our things away at the direction of Mama. We continued to insist on their return and finally got them back and threw them away in a place where no one could retrieve them. That we refused to hand over our clothes is a sign that we fear the 'silent power' and to fear is already to be half vanquished. Let him know that but we would rather not measure our strength against his.

The next day Ma approached us and in the nicest way asked for some clothes of ours. We said nothing and continued quietly with our work. The friendly requests became demands, became commands, but we paid no attention to it. 'Right, if you will not give it to me then I will get it myself,' Ma said angrily and left.

We were surprised by our impudence: we had allowed Ma to go on talking, kept silent and did not even look up from our work.

At first we had planned to write a sarcastic letter to our brother and sister but we let that pass. We decided to wait with writing till our bad mood had subsided and we were able to forgive them completely. Then we wrote them a sincere letter in which we thanked them for their help. Even though that had been of no benefit to us their intentions had been good and for that we were grateful. We hoped with all our heart that in the future it might be granted us to repay their goodness with goodness. It was <u>meant</u>; we said not a word about <u>his</u> letter.

A few days ago we received a letter from our sister-in-law. She was astounded that after all that had happened I could still write such a letter. She buttered us up, called us the chosen of God etc. She would pray to God to keep us pure and noble. She longed for us (our clothes) we must come to stay with her soon. Our brother wrote a brief, businesslike note, in our language; nothing about our letter. At his request we had been corresponding with him for some time in Dutch, now he set it aside. Dutch is not respectful enough. That is fine by us!

They are no doubt in fear that we will make public what they had once promised us. If they betray us then that is still no reason that we should also betray them. We would hope never to act so meanly. Their letters in which they applauded our plans and promised us every support we will keep. The Assistant Resident who had told him about the 'important gentlemen'

etc is coincidently on good terms with the Regent of D[emak]. And, most fortuitously, a representative of his came to talk to him after the Ass. Res. had told him. What will be the consequences of these events?

We told our brother here about the affair and his opinion is the same as ours. He burst out laughing when we told him of the intention of our oldest brother to become a soldier if we go to H. He does not say 'stay!' Also Father has not said that. But we are not depending on it: what has not yet occurred may eventuate. We are prepared, prepared to experience disappointments, blows, broken hearts. But to give up? No! We no longer expect the least assistance from anyone here any more, we have to be our own friend and helper. Help will come from God and ourselves. Perhaps the time will come when we can laugh about these difficult days! We told Ma about the G.G., about Mijnheer de Meester.[354] Ma was most impressed, said nothing, left us alone. No, Mama it will not be that easy to push us off our perch. We feel strong in the knowledge of the correctness of our aim.

No, we did not dare to follow your advice to go to Klein Scheveningen to find a diversion; we feared that that beautiful peaceful spot would comfort us only too well. We are going to make a terrible confession. When we were so terribly upset, such an overwhelming desire came up in us for … peace! Both of us had one and the same longing: to leave all that pettiness behind, to allow ourselves to drift on the blue waves. Where? To the land of the sun in the distant yonder! Or we would like to walk forever without stopping, from morning to night till we fell down dead. And more of such crazy thoughts floated around in our confused brain. And once to our horror, we found ourselves listening with an intense interest to a conversation about the effects of different poisons. We acknowledged it to ourselves and held each other tightly: 'Oh sister, sister, have we come to this?' Strange, we did not think about their suffering, absolutely not, but about yours, and his, our friend far away, who would suffer all alone because of – those unworthy ones. Because that is what we would be if we faint-heartedly turned our backs on the struggle.

You see how nasty we have been. We have the feeling we have been ill, very ill, and are now recovering. We are longing for you, Moeder, our Moeder. Oh, you do not know how indescribably sweet that name for you is for us. It is not in order to replace the cold 'Mevrouw' but because we feel, truly, to be a friend of yours and you to be ours, more than just an acquaintance, or a friend

354 Th H de Meester became Dutch prime minister in September 1902 leading a Liberal cabinet.

but part of us. The way you are for us and of us only a mother can be. Only a mother loves in this way. Thank you Moedertje.

We are very happy that everything is going so well for Annie and that she is enjoying her stay in B. – may it remain that way. We received her gigantic letter a few days after yours. It is wonderful that everything is going as planned. She is a sweet, sincere child, we all like her very much. When we farewelled her she made us promise to tell her everything about us, always. We did not want to promise her this. Perhaps if everything was going well, but not when we were miserable. And why should we? We would only make her sad and that child herself needs comfort.

We feel ourselves to be much older than her and until recently she also believed that we really were older. She was indignant and extremely disappointed in us when later it appeared otherwise. Have we sinned, disadvantaged her by leaving her under the delusion that we were much older than she was? She is very grateful to you for your warmth and is overjoyed that she may come to stay with you. We are very happy about it for your sake. Have a nice time with her and help her where you can, won't you. Sweet dear child, we hope with all our heart that she will be happy. We heartily wish her flowers and sunshine.

Mev. Ovink also made me promise when we separated to keep us constantly informed about everything as formerly, to share with her all our cares and sorrows: 'If you are sorrowful, if you grieve, promise me that you will come to me as in the past.' We were silent, did not give her an answer but it was clear enough. No, we do not want to give that promise that we may not be able to keep. Not that our love for her has diminished or something like that but it has so depressed us in recent times that we cause others so much grief with our sorrow. We consider ourselves then so egotistical. But how is it then that we continue to tell you everything, pour out our hearts to you without restraint? How is that we freely tell you things which we cannot or will not share with others? How is it that without any hesitation we let you look into the depth of our souls? One can be very fond of many people but each in a particular way we think.

What we feel for you is something so special we cannot describe it. It is something so beautiful, so warm, so pure and noble! And what makes the bonds more intimate between us is perhaps the warm fiery blood which runs through your and our veins. For Moedertje Mies we are children of her heart, for us you are a spiritual mother. May that always be so Moeder, our Moeder! We love you so much! We long for you very, very much but that will have to remain a dream.

Brother Boesono has finally received his appointment, the demotion. Poor boy! And he did not even get the place which, while he had not asked for it, he had been promised. Oh promises! They are usually like rusks, made to be broken!

'Come on brother, will we now go to Batavia?' we said to him.

'To be completely finished off' he asked, smiling sadly.

It was with great difficulty that my parents could keep him from his resolve 'to get out'.[355] He was made more promises, new rusks were baked.

For us a new 'akal' has been thought up to obtain what they so very much want from us. Very soon our oldest sister is expecting the birth of her baby and if Ma goes there she will take us in order to leave us there. Mamie presented this to us very sweetly. What is it all about? They would then be able to easily take away the desired clothes, there we would not be able to lock them away as here. So often we have to laugh about it. Is it not as though we have become idiotic? It is the history of the birth of new ideas in the Land of the Sun!

How we would love to be able to speak to the G.G. and Mev R[ooseboom] personally. Should we turn to her? Earlier we had occasionally exchanged letters. For them, you understand, we would gladly do it, we would gladly get from her an expression of sympathy in black and white. Preferably of course we would like a personal audience with the G.G., Mev R and other important ooms. It is as Heer v.K[ol] says: it is easier to express what one thinks and wants in conversation.

Mas To wrote to us that we should write to Mevrouw van Zuylen.[356] She has interested herself in our cause and her husband would bring up the question with Mijnheer de Ranitz, a gentleman at court, private secretary to the Queen Mother and with the minister. Both will be leaving for the Indies in several months time…

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

7 November 1902

My dear, sweet Moeke,

Thank you so much for your letter which we read with great pleasure. Thank you for your information regarding the small table – that will be fine. The woodcarver brought the table tops here this morning, they were rejected and new ones will be made. We had considered keeping the lines of the drawing

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355 That is, to get out of the colonial civil service. Although he was not appointed to replace his father as Regent of Jepara, Boesono was eventually made Regent of Ngawi.

356 Mevrouw van Zuylen-Tromp, president of Oost en West.

regular, suspecting that that was where the silver would be applied. We understand completely what you mean; this matter is therefore cleared up.

No Moeke, the combs are not like the ones you meant, I had misunderstood you. I thought you wanted Native tortoiseshell combs, not for combing your hair but the ones we wear as a hair decoration, and that you wanted some out of interest, to add to your collection of Native artefacts. The combs that I meant are as shown in the accompanying drawing but, of course, bigger.[357] I suppose you do not want them now. You cannot comb your hair with them, only arrange it after the wind has ruffled it.

Please do not regard this letter as a reply to your entire letter. I am only answering a few points that you raise. Those concerning your order are now dealt with, so on to other matters.

You asked if we had not yet heard anything from Heer v.K. No, nothing, neither from him nor from his wife. From her we could have received a reply to our letters a long time ago. Perhaps they have got lost, that would disappoint us greatly because they contain much that we very much want her to know and we could not possibly rewrite it from memory. We hope the silence is due to their being very busy and not due to illness or other misfortune. We had begun to grow very fond of these dear, kind people, averse to lies and selfishness, of one mind and soul, living a pure, elevated ideal! We are very much looking forward to hearing from them again, even if they write nothing concerning our cause.

From others, however, we have heard something about this. This afternoon, together with your letter I received the enclosed card. It is from Stella Hartshalt,[358] who, through the intermediary of her friend, the parliamentary deputy, Melchers, was the one who sent Heer v.K. to us. What do you think of the question and the advice that is marked in blue pencil? Would you ask Mijnheer about it please, dearest? You had just written that it did not involve the G.G. and that our going to H. would not involve his intercession. And now this announcement? What is the situation? And what do you think about the other items of news on the postcard? Heer Melchers, who is also a social democrat, seems to be taking a very keen interest in it.

We are awaiting news from Heer v.K. We do not have to be afraid, do we, that those who are interested in our cause may overreach their goal in their eagerness?

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357 Drawings were not included with the extant letter.

358 Hartshalt is Stella Zeehandelaar's married name (See the letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, 15 July 1902). It is conceivable that the marriage of this committed feminist had an influence on Kartini's thinking.

My beloved had to read this card! We have received another pressing invitation to come, they are so 'kangen' about us. I am sitting here very contentedly: in the distance the gentle perfume of cepaka, in front of our room Ma is sitting on a bench and down below is my Moeder. From time to time she calls out to me and then I stop writing briefly to answer her and I do so calmly because I am writing to my Moeke! Do you know what name my sisters tease me with? – 'favourite daughter'. I could be tempted to come to believe there is some truth in this if it were not that I was convinced that I am a 'much cursed person'.

But what do I really care as long as I am convinced that I possess the love of my beloved, of my Moeke.

Goodnight now my dear, dear Moeke. To you all the warmest greetings from all of us here and a goodnight kiss from sister R. and your own daughter

K.

We received Didi's photograph. We did not recognize him. Only after we had stared at it for a long time did we recognize the features again that we can see on another portrait. Our sister is having a bad time, our brother-in-law, Rek[soharjono], is very ill. Poor, poor girl!

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

13 November 1902

Dearest Moeke,

Just a word, merely to send you what you had requested – information about the wayangs and some idea of the étagère that at the moment exists only in our imagination. Work has not yet commenced on it, as I wrote to you I have been thinking about the idea. We made a sketch of it for you, I hope it is clear. If you would like to have it, give me the measurements, or would you want to leave it to us? It is all the same to us. For you we are always at your service! Feel free to request anything of us. We are happy when we can do something for you. The more you give us to do the happier we are!

If anything should not be clear then tell me. We still have ideas for some small objects in mind, we will put them down on paper in due course and send them to you for your opinion. We are also thinking about a writing table that would accompany sister's wardrobe. We will have a photo made of it. That wardrobe must remain in the family – we have promised this to Anne – it will not be made for anyone else.

And now, good night Moedertje dearest, our best wishes to Mijnheer and to your sister and for our own Moeke a hearty kiss from R. and your own

K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

20 November 1902

My dearest Moeke,

We had promised to send you news as soon as anything came from H. Something has come, a long letter from Mevrouw v.K. and also one from another friend who is looking after our interests. While it is not what you were expecting, it is nevertheless not insignificant and we do think you will be interested in what Mevr. v.K. has written to us: 'It is possibly better not to publish your letter – (wonderful) – I mean, the first one you wrote to me. Especially because the Government will now soon have to make a decision.'

'My husband wants to propose a scholarship for daughters of Native rulers such as exists for their sons – that would be the best solution and the most appropriate for you – after you, others could profit from it, girls whom, without you actually knowing them, you would be helping in this way. Also from the point of view of fairness: why everything for the man and not for the woman? Now let us just wait. Your names are now already sufficiently well known through the publication of my article. The battles that you can foresee we can therefore leave till later, when you are even better armed. You will never lack for want of a battle.'

We would love to read her 32 pages together with you, it contains so much of importance apart from matters concerning us directly. Perhaps we will write to you about it later, now we want to limit ourselves specifically to this matter.

But how very kind and good she is to your daughters! She so rarely has a free day and that she has devoted entirely to us. However it was not sufficient for her to write us that long, informative letter, she wanted also to provide us with other spiritual food! Again she has sent us a pile of informative literature and she has also sent us photos of herself and the children. All of this has made us feel so grateful, so content and – humble.

We would also love to send you several of the 24 pages from Heer van Overveldt[359] to read, from which you can conclude how several influential people in the Hague are thinking about this issue. At the moment we need

[359] Van Overveldt was a socialist party member.

them to prepare a reply. For the moment I shall just write you out some extracts: 'After that I had an extensive discussion with the former G.G. van der Wijck. In the first rush of enthusiasm Mevr. v.d.W.[360] had proposed to generate interest – in your case – amongst many ladies and to invite you to come to Holland for your education. From the beginning this idea was not shared by Heer v.d.W., who was of the opinion that here in Holland you should not be dependent on charity which would not be at all compatible with your social position as daughter of a Regent' – (really!)

'The discussion I had with him, which was not without interest, convinced me that Heer v.d.W. could support the Government's plan regarding education that was to be undertaken in the Indies but would not support an education in the Netherlands. The situation is this (and this opinion is also shared by Heer JM Pijnacker Hordijk,[361] member of the second chamber with whom I have discussed this at length): that there are fears that the result that may be achieved may not be that which was aimed at. There is a concern about placing Javanese women in European society with all its attendant, less than desirable, aspects.'

'Heer v.d.W. also discussed the absence of a budget item to cover such a proposal; over and against the consideration of such a Government offer is the question of what advantage there would be to the Government and evidence of a beneficial result could not be provided. I do not share this view, but, rather, believe that nothing of significance can be achieved if one is not willing to take a chance. There is some danger attached to every initiative, otherwise the high value we place on 'initiative' would be meaningless. A great man must dare to take a chance, and, together with that, must be prepared to accept the responsibility that goes with it. In any event Heer v.d.W. believes as I do that nothing can be done until a new Minister of Colonies has been appointed.'[362]

Heer v.O. had visited the late minister and had discussed everything with him in detail. Apropos this and that, and in particular the minister's request that in matters that concern the Indies, a memorandum needed to be provided that would posit as a self-evident principle that nothing would be achieved unless first the moral basis of Javanese society were improved, in particular in regard to the nurture and education of the Child in its early years in order to

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360 Mevrouw van der Wijck, wife of the former Governor General.

361 Possibly JM Pijnacker Hordijk, a leading liberal progressive member of parliament and former plantation owner, brother of the former Governor General C Pijnacker Hordijk.

362 The Minister of Colonies in previous Liberal government, J Th Cremer, was replaced by AWF Idenburg, member of the new 'reformist' government led by the religious Anti-Revolutionaire party.

counter prejudice, he had presented a paper in which he discussed our case.[363] He had just delivered it when he became aware that on that very day the Minister had died. Regarding the new minister he says: 'Heer Idenburg[364] is regarded as a very, very, clever person and is still young so that one may expect that due to his youth, as well as his ability, he will have the energy to instigate legislation that might not be taken by an ordinary person or by someone who was too old to still feel any enthusiasm for what is good.' 'The majority are too frightened to chance an arm…'

Enough. As soon as he sees that the opportunity is right he will request an audience and then he will write to tell us whether or not the time is right for us to prepare a petition ourselves, either to the G.G. or to the minister, or alternatively to address ourselves directly to the Queen. He is greatly in favour of the latter idea and already has a petition prepared which merely awaits the intercession of the minister in order for it to be presented to the Queen. He knows the secretary of H.M.'s cabinet very well. We had asked him to speak to Heer van Kol and he wrote back that he would certainly do so, he knows him very well and has worked for him. 'At the moment the route is via the Minister of Colonies, if possible in association with Heer v. K[ol]. as the only possible way and I would advise you against involving too many people of too many different persuasions here in the Netherlands.' (We will not do this, you know that.) 'Nevertheless try to win over Heer Abendanon to your cause.'[365]

What do you think of that Moeke? We wrote to them immediately to say that from that quarter we fear formidable opposition! In conclusion he wrote: 'Decidedly, politics will be involved in your affairs here and rest assured, if your dreams are to be realized, it will in part at least be the result of a particular political process.' [366]

That does not sound very encouraging! But let us leave that issue now and tell you how extremely grateful we are for the friendship and support of Heer

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363 Education was central for the new government's expressed concern for the welfare and development of the Indies, so Kartini's case, which appeared to directly fit this aim, was being presented in these terms. The comment however makes apparent that there was still a significant resistance to the reformist program.

364 AWF Idenburg, a former colonial army officer, was Minister of Colonies between 1902 and 1905.

365 This series of extracts from letters from her Dutch supporters provides a clear insight into the political climate in the Dutch parliament at the time and the significance attached to Kartini's initiative. Conrad van Deventer, key polemicist of an 'ethical policy' and later an important voice in support of her memory and of the school established by Dutch philanthropy in her name, was not at that time a member of parliament.

366 The comment provides further indication of the political sensitivities that Kartini's quest touched upon.

van Overveldt who, while he does not know us personally except for what he has heard about us from Mas To,[367] is so interested in our cause that, without ever having received a direct request from us, had already begun making efforts to help us to put our ideas into practice. He works very hard for it with much love and enthusiasm – he could not promote the interests of his own children more. He is a friend of Father's, his friendship and love has been proved. It was he who returned Mas To to us. Kind, dear man, it will be a beautiful moment for us should it be granted us, to shake him personally by the hand, to thank him for his friendship, his love and his service!

And now about something else, the small table was brought here this morning for approval – and it was passed! I had better not say anything about it as it will have to remain a surprise for you.

And so goodnight Moeke! Give Mijnheer and your sister our warm regards. For you both a hearty kiss from sister R. and your own daughter.

K.

Sunday we went to church – minister – in the club – holy communion – girls confirmed. Make sense of that![368]

Will you send the sketch of the portrait stand soon? And can I then also have some money to buy wood and so on and pay the workers.

Bye!

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

21 Nov. 1902

Dear, kind Moeke,

What a wonderful surprise we had! How can we thank you enough for it? I dare not kiss you now that you appear so elegant, so proud and so noble before me! I will just look at you and you can then read in my eyes how very thankful I am to you for this priceless gift!

'Like a Queen!' the children exclaimed in unison when they saw your photograph. Yes, like a queen in appearance but that which lies under those beautiful clothes, which lives within that beautiful body, is more regal! The heart that beats behind that beautiful man-made material is so noble, and the

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367 The reference is to her brother, Raden Mas Sosrokartono.

368 The occasion is referred to again later in her letter of 21 November to Edie Abendanon. Kartini had also once attended the consecration of a new church in Jepara. The correspondence with Mevrouw van Kol may have stimulated an interest in attending a Christian church service.

intelligence which hides behind the beautiful forehead is so penetrating. How your eyes speak to me, Moeke! They speak volumes.

Ah, when will the moment come that these dear lips will open to speak a warm word to us, that these arms will embrace us and press us to that heart, and those eyes look warmly and tenderly into ours?

Moeke, we fear that that time still lies in the swaddling clothes of an unknown, inscrutable future.

We are deeply grateful for your kind invitation and you do know that we would like nothing more than to accept it, which for us would mean going to a land of glory. To be with you day and night, cherished by your warm love – how avidly we dream of taking a deep draught from that cup of happiness! Dearest, we yearn for such comfort, for such priceless days in which we could feel ourselves closely surrounded by pure friendship and a warm sincere love. But we are not able and are not allowed to do all the things, oh, far from everything, that we would so very much love to do, you know that. Who would bring us to you? We can understand them not allowing us to travel by ourselves to B. And then, it is almost Puasa, there is always so much to do at that time and they certainly would not want to be without us.[369] And thirdly, after all that has happened, we would not want to ask for anything. Let some peace and calm return first, then we will see what we can do.

To be honest, of course we would very much like to 'slip away' to you, should we go to Semarang one of these days. We would certainly do so if we did not fear that it would cause them to die of shock and that we would inconvenience you and that thereby everything would be thrown into confusion!

You are not angry, eh Moeke? We would love nothing better you know, but at the moment we do not see any chance for it. Who knows, however, what tomorrow or the day after may bring? Perhaps someone may come here who we could go with, or something else may happen here! Well, let's hope for the best!

Thank you very much for forwarding sister's photographs. What beautiful photos of the woodcarving they are, they have been so beautifully produced. Did Edie do those? They have to be returned to you, don't they, Moeke, because they have to go to Holland? But your photograph is for us, isn't it? Eh, I am so very pleased with it! How spoiled we have been this week! The mail has continuously brought us wonderful gifts from dear friends!

I had just written to you yesterday about the sketch.

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[369] Puasa, the Muslim fasting month, typically involved extra work preparing meals and receiving guests.

I have to constantly look at the beautiful photos, they are so clear that one can see even the smallest detail. The small screen is wonderful! What a lovely idea to also have the boxes photographed. Whoever did that has an understanding of his craft. It is also nice that that picture frame has been included – it is very kind of you, thank you Moeke, thank you very much for that. It was a real surprise for us when we saw what had become of those ugly ducklings. Moeke, you are very kind to your daughters, much too kind even! I am already looking forward to seeing the photos in *Eigen Haard* – but bah, what a paltry article accompanies it. What banalities I threw together again this time, I had forgotten and I do not want to think about it.[370]

My Moeder is sitting with me at the moment admiring your portrait. She thinks you are so beautiful! 'There must be a noble soul residing there, it cannot be otherwise!' she says.

Perhaps it is not the way it ought to be, but often either Ma or Moeder keeps me company when I am working and I stop in order to talk to them. Often they will sit in front of my room and from there include me in their discussions. It is nice when sometimes, while I am writing letters, working out sums or doing some language work, I am at the same time undertaking a long discussion with Ma or others. Not very polite perhaps, but we enjoy it.

Mevrouw van Kol wrote to us that she had just read of a journalist – she thought it was in the *Bat[aviaasche] H[andels B[lad]* – who wrote that he was shocked that we were corresponding with her, and that she was trying to turn us into the Pandita Ramabai of our people.[371] 'This is how the world distorts everything,' she says. 'The shocked journalist will not be the first nor the last who will attempt to convince you that in corresponding out of friendship with me, you are in actual fact "going to confession with the Devil".' Well, let them say it, if we take no notice they will stop saying it eventually. Mevrouw Ovink told me that Nellie van Kol had been terribly maligned in the Indies. Yes, truly, everything grand must be pulled down, what sticks out must be cut back and what shines must be dulled and soiled.

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370 This section of the letter provides the background to the publication of Kartini's 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje' in *Eigen Haard* the following year. Photographs of Jepara wood-carving and the photographs of the three women were included with her article. Later, however, Kartini expressed her annoyance at the fact that the editors did not request permission to print the photographs.

371 This is a further indication of the political sensitivities that circled around the 'Kartini affair' at the time. Like her husband, Nellie van Kol had a prominent public reputation. In Nellie's case as an outspoken feminist.

We have also heard that Nellie is definitely not the woman she claims to be in her writing and that not only was she a poor housewife, but also a bad mother. We heard this long before we started corresponding with her. We had asked our informant: 'Do you know her?' And the reply was, as always: 'No, but I know it from a very good source, from someone who knows her well.' Yes we know that good source very well. If one considers it carefully then it comes down to this: 'no one has said it.' 'Everyone' is no one and 'one' is no one.

The more she is criticized, the more we come to love her.

Moeke, I now want to ask you a very silly question. What would you think if one day someone arrived for whom my heart were suddenly to beat a little more warmly than for you? Love and attraction will not allow themselves be forced or bound. Would you mind?[372]

No, you would not would you, Moeke, you are above all that?

Do you know why I am asking you? Because we have noticed it in others, very dear, kind people. And one in fact said: 'If I am a long way away from you, and someone comes along of whom you are more fond than me, then do not tell me. I could not bear it. Even from a distance I would still be jealous.' How do we interpret this? If they are jealous then they cannot really love us very much, but more themselves.[373]

When we love someone, then we must be very happy and grateful if the object of our love enjoys a lot of love, both the giving and the receiving of it. Is it not the case that when we love someone, then our dearest wish is to see our loved one happy? And happy is he who has much love and is much loved. I am not speaking here of love between a man and a woman, that is a more sensitive question about which I cannot judge. I am speaking of a love that one can feel for many people, although differently in each particular case.

Or is it self-interest on my part if I expect from others whom I love and who love me in return, that they will take pleasure in my happiness, even if this may entail giving my heart to another? I may ask you all these things, may I not, Moeke?

No, there is no one who is demanding some of the space you inhabit in my heart.

What an impression this letter will make on you! That I am a tiresome asker of questions and…

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372 While the modern reader may interpret this as a reference to a possible friendship with a suitor this seems unlikely and may be an attempt to placate any sense of rivalry Rosa might have felt regarding Kartini's closeness with Nellie van Kol.

373 This does suggest Kartini was concerned that Rosa Abendanon might be jealous of the influence Nellie van Kol was exercising over her, both with regard to her spiritual condition and in arranging for her study in the Netherlands.

There is so much in my personal life about which I would like to be enlightened.

If you find my letter too silly just think that I was in an overwrought state when I wrote it. And that was your fault. Your photograph did this, I am so incredibly happy with it. Goodnight Moeke. When I have regained my calm I will come and gossip with you.

Give our warm regards to your sister and Mijnheer from us all. Once again many thanks for your beautiful photograph, with a hearty kiss from R. and your own

K.

To EC Abendanon

21 November 1902

You should know that three of the four shelves of our bookcase are completely full, the fourth we are keeping free for photographs of our friends and other mementos. In that way we have all our friends together. You are standing between Mama and our brother Kartono, a little further along is Dr Adriani, that very nice intellectual and people's friend. Then there is the photo of a dear creature, refined and fresh like an unblemished flower who we love very much.[374] Papa is there as well in his official costume. You really are in good company. It is somewhere where we come every day; the day has not begun for us if we have not seen the faces of these dear faithful friends.

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If we think about it carefully, it is probably good that not all our wishes are fulfilled. While it would be dreadful if there was nothing that we wanted, it would be a pretty sorry state of affairs if everything we wished for came true. We rarely wish for something thoughtlessly which, should it be granted would bring us sorrow. From personal experience we know that often the fulfilment of our dearest wish is accompanied by bitter tears.

We have an idea that one day we will see you but that that meeting will be very brief. A meeting, a greeting and then separation again all in a couple of minutes. We will get, as it were, merely a glimpse of each other and then forever be lost to each other. Silly, isn't it, that we have this idea and can't get

374 Probably a photo of Annie Glaser.

it out of our heads.[375] Why should we long for a personal meeting if a meeting of minds is already so good. Surely we don't need anything more. Our mind, isn't that which is best in us? And if we know the best thing in us, what more would we want?

* * * *

What did you think of the fire screen made of Jepara woodcarving – isn't it beautiful? Oh, I can't tell you how happy I am that the art of our country is increasingly becoming known and appreciated. Praise to all those friends of Java who are revealing the arts of the Indies and thus the inner beauty of its people. We hope heartily that this interest in the arts of the Indies will not become like so many other interests, a fleeting fashion.

No, of course, that won't happen, at least we hope not although we must admit that most of those who now express interest in our art only do it because it is fashionable. The ones who initially encouraged this interest did so out of a deep conviction and in the long run it is they who will win out over the desire to imitate that motivates the majority. But isn't that the history of everything that is new, even that which is destined to have a long life? But let me not spin this topic out any further.

* * * *

You see I would love to live several different lives, for instance live in a mining district in the midst of the miners, or in a native Christian community in the midst of Native Christians, in a Chinese or Malay district of a town and so on.[376] In particular I would very much like to live in the midst of a desa or kampong, amongst the people. This has always had a great appeal for me, I know that then our people would come to hold me closer to their hearts. You can only learn about the soul of whatever people it may be after you have lived in their midst and lived with those people.

I have already seen so many beautiful aspects of our people: this is but a foretaste of what I would enjoy if I lived amongst them. We try as much as possible to have contact with the people and when we go out alone then we always go and visit one or more kampong houses. In the beginning they

375 Kartini never met EC (Edie – Didi) Abendanon in person.

376 The tradition of early port cities which evolved specific ethnic community districts (camps) had been institutionalized by the colonial government which appointed ethnic community leaders to represent them.

regarded this as rather strange but now they think it is nothing unusual any more.[377]

The hand of a child is quickly filled – and so is the hand of a childlike people. They are very sensitive to genuine kind-heartedness and also have a good sense of humour. Because of this with a good joke that makes them laugh one can get heavy jobs done in good spirits.

Over the last few months we have had workmen from the Department of Public Works here every day. They are busy rebuilding the back of the house, we are going to get a nice pendopo at the back. During their break we often visit the work area to talk to the workmen. Can you imagine your sisters sitting on a heap of sand surrounded by tired workmen wearing next to nothing, smoking a cigarette or chewing sirih? It is of course up to us to begin such a conversation; were it not necessary they would prefer to spend the entire day saying nothing rather than be the one to initiate a conversation with a superior.

It is very interesting. In this way we get to hear this and that that otherwise would remain outside our ken. This group of workers is under the supervision of an Indo.[378] At first he was quite surly and withdrawn, did not even offer a greeting when he came and left. Now we are good friends – it was we who first greeted him and thereafter spoke to him. At first he was terribly shy but now he can really converse! Yesterday I talked with him again. The minister had been and conducted a service … in the Soes,[379] even conducting Holy Communion there. We were there, the Indo and I and, in reference to that, we talked about religion, and it was then that I heard words that touched me greatly. This is how one of those much despised Indos think and feel. Even though the language in which he expressed himself was incorrect, the thoughts it contained were pure. He is kind to those workers who get along with him well while still being respectful. We often heard them sharing a joke with the 'tuan', a sign that the boss was good to them. When they were chastised, had to redo something then we didn't hear them complain. That's nice, isn't it – many 'bosses' could learn a lesson from that sinyo.[380]

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377 Kartini is very aware of her isolation from 'the people' while at the same time, as a member of the nobility, she was convinced that her elevated social position obligated her class to assume a leadership role.

378 That is, a person of mixed European and Javanese parentage. The majority of the European population at the turn of the century was of mixed descent. Kartini was primarily in contact with educated 'white' Europeans temporarily in the Indies for the duration of their employment, often referred to as 'totoks'.

379 Soes (= Societeit), the colloquial abbreviation for the Social Club building for Europeans.

380 The term applied to Eurasian settlers, and was derived from the Portuguese 'senhor'.

To Nellie van Zuylen-Tromp

(November 1902)[381]

Our prayer is: help, support us in our endeavours to make us useful in the interests of our people and, especially, her women. Help us to free them from the heavy burden that the old, old traditions have placed on her shoulders. Help us raise her up to make her more truly a woman and mother. Better prepared for the great task for which Mother Nature has destined her: to be mankind's first educator!

Not without reason it is said: 'Vice and virtue the child sucks in with its mother's milk.' We are utterly convinced that as long as the Javanese woman does not participate in the process of education, to nurture her people that important work will not be able to prosper well regardless of how many white people might expend all their energy and love to it.

The interest you have all shown in our efforts makes us very glad, this is a great moral support for us and gives us even more hope, more courage and more confidence to face the future that will surely not just bring us flowers and sunshine but also many battles, difficulties and perhaps also grief.

But when has anything of value ever been achieved without struggle and difficulty?

Certainly we can count on a fierce and determined battle: archaic concepts handed down from generation to generation, rusted on ideas cannot be brushed aside with a sigh. Many, many tears have to flow, hearts must bleed in order to throw off those fatal traditions, to wipe out those rusted on old ideas.

We know it but yet we remain kneeling before the altar of our heart's desire, our ideal!

Objections, difficulties there undoubtedly are but should we therefore lie down; do we have the right to neglect the struggle to achieve the good because there are dangers attached to this? The victory that we hope to achieve over the ignorance, the prejudice of our people, will be beautiful. That wonderful victory is worth all the trials because it will be for the benefit of many. God give us the strength needed for the battle and to achieve the victory.

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381 This partial letter, addressed to the president of Oost en West, for whom she had now been engaged to arrange woodcarving orders, was published as part of an article in *Koloniaal Weekblad,* 25 December 1902. It was reproduced in Allard (1976), pp. 428–9.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Semarang, 4 Dec. 1902

Postcard

Dearest Moedertje,

Please do not think ill of me for putting aside the matter of your table. When we left home they were at work on it, I cannot tell you how far they have progressed. I regret that I have been of so little service to you. We have already been away from home for a week. We were called over and we literally rushed off. Sister Soelastri had a son on 23 Nov., a fine healthy child. Arriving in Semarang on Friday we discovered – R. and I – that the little one was no longer amongst us. We had not known it had been ill. R and I then continued on to Kendal where we found our Sister in great sorrow. Poor little mother, we were glad we could be with her, it did her good. The only sign we found of our nephew was his grave. We are now with our oldest brother in Semarang and we were initially planning to go home tomorrow but now it looks as though it will be later because my sister-in-law has become ill. We do not have the heart to leave her on her own, she has no one to nurse her. It is not yet certain when we will be going home, our sister will have to get better first. In the meantime I am sorry about the table. I had not yet had an opportunity to have the silver made. Do not be angry. Goodbye, heartiest greetings from your

Kartini

Sister's little one died on the 5th day, he suffered from lockjaw.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

12 December 1902

Dearest Moeke,

Would you thank the good Sint Nicolaas warmly on our behalf for the box of presents which he sent from Batavia and through your intermediary, no less.[382] We are very, very pleased with them. The glorious fans will be so useful, even though we really think it is a shame to make use of them straight away. This is really an example of uniting the beautiful with the practical.

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382 Dutch tradition was for children to receive presents for Sinterklaas on 6 December and to maintain the pretense that presents are given by St Nicolaas himself. The sisters received presents from Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri each year confirming her role as 'mother' to her 'children'.

The heat here is unbearable and it is only December, the few drops of rain make the temperature even higher rather than reducing it. Our beautiful wall plates are already hanging on the wall, mine under the photograph of all of you, above our writing table. I am so pleased with them, Moeke! Please tell Sinterklaas. My beautiful gobelin picture[383] is also hanging on the wall in a neat frame of sono wood above our book collection. The sweets were attacked straightaway and the young ones were unanimous that they were delicious. We are sending a few chocolates to our nephew, the child of my brother.

Give Sinterklaas our most heartfelt thanks from us all, will you?

My postcard from Semarang has already informed you that we have been away from home for some time. On arriving home we discovered your card. The little table is ready, Moeke, apart from the silver work which has just been begun. Our departure had been so hasty, and thinking we would only be away for a short time, I did not leave any orders at home for finishing off the table which at the time was still being worked on by the woodcarver.

We were away for 10 days and in the meantime the Puasa has commenced. And all of a sudden I realized that during the Puasa period the goldsmiths are inundated with work.[384] The day after our return – we arrived home in the evening – I immediately contacted our goldsmith but alas, my suspicions were realized. He could not help me. I asked another goldsmith to come. Everywhere I was turned down and received the same answer: '<u>After</u> Lebaran I will be at your service.' I was desperate. Then our goldsmith became sorry for me, he had approached a friend who could work under his supervision but on one condition, that I would not hurry him. I had to take account of the time, it was Puasa and an empty stomach would not allow hard work. He requested 4 weeks to complete it. And I had to accept him because I could not get anything else. I must also admit that it is a very difficult job even though on the surface it appears to be simple. The many corners which he has to follow and for each a separate shape because they are not exactly the same, makes what appears to be simple, quite complex.

I am very sad about the fact that I have served you so poorly. Believe me, I have done all I can. Neither I, nor any one else could have foreseen that such tragic circumstances would intervene. Please Moeke, help me by exercising patience. Really, I am very sorry about it. At Semarang and elsewhere I was always worrying about the table. As far as the carving is concerned, it has

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383 Presumably Rosa sent Kartini a popular reproduction picture of a portion of Gobelin tapestry.

384 It is traditional to give presents at Lebaran, the celebration of the end of the Puasa, the fasting month.

succeeded wonderfully and we think your table is the best that we have ever seen from our Singo.[385] It is wonderful to see how that good soul is constantly progressing.

Recently he miraculously escaped a great tragedy. Eleven houses near his belonging to his friends burnt down, the coconut palms on his property were already well alight, but as if by a miracle, his house was completely untouched. The whole town came out to see this miracle and to ask the fortunate owner of the house which was spared, what 'ilmu', 'jimat' or magical weapon he possessed which ensured that, while all the surrounding houses were totally burnt, his house had been saved unharmed. No, he had no ilmu, nor jumat, nor 'magical weapon', he only had Gusti Allah and he was the one who had saved the house for him and his family.

A nice reply, don't you think? But now, listen to what followed. The day after the fire the man came to us and, can you imagine, he thanked us for safeguarding his home. There was no denying it, our blessing had kept the fire from his house. It was the power of our prayers of blessing for him that had safeguarded his house from evil. What do you say to that? Such a simple and naïve belief is very touching!

I ask myself whether or not I am doing the right thing to take from these simple souls their naïve belief with which they are so happy. The stupidest person can destroy, but to create? We cannot yet give them our belief. And is it even possible to give one's belief to another? Belief, real, true belief, not one that is simply taken on trust, inherited, arises from within the soul… We think it so frightening that these simple souls ascribe to us a power which neither we nor anyone else possesses.

In this fashion we experience so many lovely things from our friends amongst the people!

How I regret that you did not see the woodcarving, I would so much have liked to hear your opinion. Wonderful that Mijnheer liked it. Heer van Lawick van Pabst told us that the woodcarving will be sent to Osaka: does that mean that the Sinterklaas showcase will not proceed? But an exhibition in Japan is also quite good, if not better.[386]

We would gladly have a lot of woodcarvings made for you but only after the Puasa, then our fellows will attack the large pile of work awaiting them with a fresh enthusiasm and a new energy.

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385 Singo (Singowirio) was the name of the key woodcarver regularly referred to but this is the first time he has been named.

386 An exhibition of products of the Netherlands-Indies was included in the fifth Japanese national 'industries' exhibition held in Osaka in March 1902.

Oost en West have again placed an order for *f*250 and if we get them to undertake several hundred guilders more work than was agreed to, then that would be all right as well.[387] Wonderful, isn't it? And now your order as well! Is this for yourself? Of course, gladly, you know that, but then tell me how much you wish to spend. If we know the amount then we can work out what kind of things we can have made for you, or would you prefer to specify this yourself? In that case I enclose a list of objects that are being made for O. en W. together with the prices. Just indicate those you would like to have made. We will be having them made up for O. en W. We have beautiful wood for the carving work but that will only be for a very few and specifically our best friends, therefore you in the first place. That wood, a beautiful light yellow colour, actually a cream, and so fine, is not available to buy, it is from our garden. It is from trees which have grown up with us, in which we climbed as children and under which later as young girls we often sat or strolled around, dreaming in bright moonlight when a breath of wind in their crown would bring down a rain of pure white sweetly-perfumed flowers, fluttering down upon us. Poetic trees eh? You know them too, it is the Kemuning!

Just tell me to what value woodcarving you want and then, when the cost is determined, I would like to have part or all of the money here. I have already given the woodcarver *f*25 for the table but it is not yet finished; he will present the account later. Also I have already bought the silver and have given the goldsmith part of his wage. In total it will cost over *f*50. How much it will be precisely I do not yet know.

The portrait stand will be completed in a few days' time. At the moment the screen for the G.G. must be completed first. We are having many problems with this. It is an almost impossible task to procure large pieces of sono wood, particularly pieces of good quality. Several pieces we had had sawn up for nothing, they looked good from the outside but inside we discovered they were split. And also it is so terribly hard.

At home there was also a letter from Didi waiting for us with which we were very happy. We would not like our lives to be without his hearty friendship and we hope very much to have it for the rest of our lives. We are very fond of that dear, sincere and very intelligent boy, our dear brother! Thank you for the photos, how <u>well</u> he can do this. I wrote to him about it not knowing he had developed them. He would like a small table of carved wood. Give him our warm regards, it will be some time before we will be able to write to him ourselves. The Puasa with its many activities is such a busy, nerve-wracking

[387] This indicates the rapid growth of the Jepara woodworking industry.

month. It is fortunate that there is a Puasa month only once a year! Nice isn't it that the New Year and our Lebaran coincide.

And now we thank you very much for the rings that are already on our fingers. They are of great value to us now that you have christened them with your touch. There is still some of the simplicity and some of the naïve belief of our people in what you may consider our childish wish that our rings be first worn by you. We do not deny our blood!

Once again our sincere thanks, Moeke! A pearl from the depths of Jepara's sea and which rested on Moeke's dear finger. We are wearing it with our smooth ring on the same finger. So much of what is nice but also much of what is bitter is attached to this. We received it from our Moeder and it is made of one piece of gold.

13 December

Just a moment ago we received a letter from Anneke. Wonderful to hear that she has been staying with you and has had such an enjoyable few days! We are really pleased and the visit has also done you good, hasn't it Moedertje? I know that my Moeke is in her element when she has someone, particularly someone who needs a lot of love, to care for and spoil. When will it be our turn to taste that heavenly manna, to be closely embraced by your love, to be cherished by that fine noble heart which we know is beating for us warmly.

What one loves, one so wants to see and make happy. When I hear you complain about how overwhelmingly busy you are, and I think of you tired and exhausted, then I feel so sad that with all my love for you – and you know how great that is – I am powerless to help.

I cannot relieve you of the slightest worry, merely add to the burden you have to carry. You do not admit it but I know that when you think of us, it is but to worry. I have a feeling that there is no end in sight for this concern.

14 December

Uncle has visited you! We thought he would. We are very curious to learn some details about this visit.[388] I do not know if he is aware of how well we are acquainted with each other, you and I, I mean. If you had asked him about his family in Jepara then you will have learnt enough from his answer

388 Kartini's uncle, RMAA Hadiningrat was highly regarded in Batavia as a progressive regent and supporter of colonial reform. However Kartini suspected that he was using his visit to lobby the director of education to block plans to support Kartini's further education, presumably not aware of Kartini's close relationship. Kartini in turn was here apparently attempting to undermine any influence he may have had with the director by providing these negative and very personal details.

to know how tenderly he loves us. Had we not thought that he had had a hand in what made us so unhappy in October? He will leave no stone unturned to ensure that our plans fail. Whatever he can do he will, that we can depend on. So, once again you see that one may be praiseworthy in one's writing, but in reality be anything but. Going on his writing, one could expect great support, particularly from him, for our cause. After all, he is the man who promotes the development of his people and his fame in the Indies and in the Netherlands is due to his ideas, proposals about popular education and development. Should he not be encouraging and appreciative of every struggle in that direction?

Oh, I still remember the fun which that supporter and promoter of the development of his people had, when a son of a Regent who was attending the HBS in Semarang did not pass. He pushed his amusement to the point where he wrote to the father asking how his son was, he had not seen his name listed under those who had passed, perhaps he had been mistaken, or had not read it properly, he had so much wanted to congratulate him. He even told us about it over dinner. It is not very nice of me, I acknowledge, to say something nasty about my own uncle. But, oh Moeke, if you knew only half of what we have discovered about him. We can put up with a lot, but everything has its limits. And he is pushing it too far.

I am so sorry for our poor Father who is so attached to his only surviving brother. How he treats us, and how he grieves us, time and time again. I respect Father's patience. There are not many like my Father in that respect, Father is able to forgive totally, whatever is done to him and Father would never think of taking revenge. That I greatly admire in my Father. To err is human, to forgive, saintly. And Father is able to forgive, not only formally, but also with his whole heart. Father forgives and forgets.

That is also the direction that we must take.

You may perhaps know that uncle has been married to an aristocrat – the sister of the present Sultan of Yogya and an aunt of his present wife. From that marriage a daughter was born and, because she had an aristocrat as mother, we must address her as 'Your Highness', 'bendoro Gusti', and of course we must speak to her in high Javanese. We are only cousins but even her sister, and an older one at that, although her mother is only a woman of the people, must address her as 'Your Highness' and also in high Javanese.

Even other children of this Raden Ayu and those of another noble-born mother must call her 'Your Highness' – it is the will of the father. Even in our society this is rather strange. When we are in the company of Europeans who understand our language and adat, then we 'Highness' the princess

even more than usual and do so loudly on purpose. This makes the little princess uncomfortable. Mean of us but we are acting in accordance with the wish of the father. All the other children call him 'father Adipati' and her – 'mother Adipati', only this aristocrat's child calls him simply 'father', and her – 'mother'.

The princess herself is actually a good child and if she is rather imperious then it is not her fault.

She herself does, I think, desire a more intimate relationship with us and she does like us. She does look to us but that 'Highness' stands as an insurmountable barrier between us. Poor children, we do really feel for them. How *rich we* are, and they are so *poor* in the midst of their riches. This aristocratic child is very rich.

The children themselves are aware of their poverty and envy us our riches. They are always happy when we are with them, then they have an opportunity to laugh loudly, which otherwise rarely happens, their governess told us. There was even a time when spontaneous laughter was totally foreign to them. We do not exaggerate this, we want only to show what things were and are like there. They learnt to laugh from us. Once we stayed there for several days and later the governess came here and said that those two days had been very good for her pupils. They saw the genuine relations amongst us and that had awoken something in them.

When they are with us they always leave reluctantly: 'Why is it always such fun with you and so unpleasant at our house?' they asked us. Poor things, poor in the midst of their material riches. They feel the lack, they long for it but do not know what it is. That fairy that can turn even a hovel into a paradise when it enters, is unknown to them. The most beautiful, the most glorious thing life can offer, they know nothing about: love.

I acknowledge freely uncle's sparkling wit, and whole-heartedly kneel in tribute to his intellect. Oh, if only a golden heart was attached to that intellect – but that would be too much, after all nothing must be perfect in this world. Only God is perfect!

Uncle has reputedly said that he did not want his daughters further educated because he had no intention of having a Resident or Assistant Resident as a son-in-law! Ah, so we, who dare to strive for knowledge and intellectual development, have an eye to catching a Resident or Assistant Resident? It is really becoming too much! Perhaps we are angling for Mr Sijthoff!!! A new perspective! It is becoming dangerous, eh? We had to laugh heartily about it. It is too silly! It is perhaps just as well that uncle does not have that idea, it would

perhaps only increase his suffering.[389] If ordinary game is already hard to catch, how much more difficult would it be to catch the rare ones?

What we want, desire, strive for, is not pantes, it is improper, low. But if father asks a man to marry us, that would be proper. Thank goodness our father is too noble to be able to do such a thing.[390]

Poor things! We feel sorry for them. The princesses are clever, much cleverer than we are, who are really only dunces. After all, what are we actually capable of doing? They speak French and English, and we are only able to mumble and scribble some Dutch. 'Who can't speak Dutch?' Uncle once asked in company in which we were included. 'Every lurah's child (desa chief) speaks Dutch. My children must speak French and English.'[391]

Salutations uncle, we bring you our respects. We concede them everything. Why can they not do likewise? We have never laid the slightest obstacle in their path, why should they oppose us in everything we do? Once we were in the company of another Regent's family who could speak no Dutch. I can still hear uncle say to his daughter-princess: 'Bring the reading box[392] to the daughter of the Regent, go on.' And uncle thought it was such a joke!

An effort is constantly made to prevent his daughters appearing in company with us. Once I received a letter from the princess (we correspond in Dutch at uncle's request – they do not lose by it) asking me to go to a festivity with her. We were to go dressed alike. I had no interest in it but father and mother said I had to and that I should not be unkind. I gave in and replied that we would appear. We arrived at the ball. Those we saw there did not include our family. When it had been ascertained that we would be coming, they had telegraphed that they would not attend. I, blockhead, did not understand that that invitation had been a means of gaining information as to whether or not we were intending to attend the festivity. And this kind of thing has happened repeatedly. Not once have we appeared together at a large gathering.

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389 Given previous lengthy descriptions of her relationship with the resident, this is a significant, if ironic comment.

390 In the end, however, it seems her father was obliged to conform to pressures exerted by his more forceful brother.

391 This could be interpreted as an anti-colonial (anti-Dutch) sentiment. Soewardi Suryaningrat later argued that if Indonesians needed a foreign language to communicate with the outside world there was no need for this to be Dutch. The Chinese business elite also preferred to provide their children with English rather than Dutch language education.

392 This refers to the 'mobile library', a box of Dutch books and periodicals, circulated amongst mainly European subscribers in Java.

When Anne was still here we were going to stay the night on the way to Semarang by tram.

We arrived, the princesses were not at home, they had left to visit an acquaintance that morning. We learned from their brother and governess that they had left suddenly, that this had not been planned beforehand, the brothers and the governess did not know where the girls had gone. Later we realized that Annie was not meant to see the girls together with us.

In any event, the girls who had fled from us saw us several days later at the theatre and, what is more, in the company of the Resident. They did not attend the wedding here. How petty everything is, oh how petty.

We heard that uncle particularly did not want us to go to Holl. because he was afraid that a family government would develop in the Residency: 'We could divide the Regencies amongst ourselves.'

It is enough to make one burst, isn't it? Bah! He fears the influence of women. We might begin to fancy ourselves! People are afraid that if we should develop some influence we would exact a price for what has been done to us. It is too ridiculous. Us and influence !!

Now he is going to cajole my brother to turn him against us. We warned him that he was going to fall into a trap. His aim is only to have our brother totally oppose what we are fighting for. And when this has been achieved, uncle will let him go, ignore him and ridicule him into the bargain. It is as though people have gone crazy, they confront my brother about us, criticize him that he does not oppose our plans that are not pantes.

We sometimes ask ourselves when we hear that, if we have not landed in some mad house. People no longer know what they are saying.

Our brother had pressed us to come. They did not have honourable intentions because they intended to thwart our plans while we trusted them. We came entrusting ourselves to God, open and honest. And what happened? First we suddenly had to leave them to go to my sister and, when we had returned, our sister-in-law became ill. They were unable to carry out their plans. Instead of being their prey we became their nurses. This was the hand of God.

We had gone to the clairvoyant, with whom we had become firm friends, of our own accord. We had suspected that it was not he but another, who wanted to place us under hypnosis. We had therefore not regarded him as the enemy but indeed, as a friend to whom we owed a debt of gratitude and we treated him accordingly. His wife has a child a few weeks old, a beautiful child to whom we immediately lost our hearts and for whom we are now knitting clothes. We were made to promise him that any time we were in the area we would visit him and his family. We will be very pleased to do this, also from

the point of view of cultural understanding as we are very interested to learn the characteristic traits of various races. We were present when he predicted that the child our sister was carrying would be beautiful, more beautiful than all her other children, and would be a boy. He told our brother that it may not be granted a long life. And truly, it was an extraordinary child, very light in colour and had all the features of its grandfather. He told me that after this boy, sister would have a daughter. When he is asked something, he briefly lowers his eyes, then looks up and gives his reply. It is remarkable how he can foretell everything so exactly.

When I speak to him again I will ask him what exactly he sees, a painting or some writing, or whether something is whispered to him. How can this extraordinary gift be explained? Our visit was not announced, it was spontaneous, on a sudden whim. Yet we found him waiting for us, he knew that we were coming. We actually had nothing to ask him, it was merely a social call. We were not received in the room in which he usually receives his visitors, but in one where very few are permitted to enter.

When we were there the previous time, a few ladies and gentlemen were just leaving, strangers who had come from a long way away as we discovered later. Our friend does *not* associate himself with improper activities, he only assists with good ones. Do you know that even high European officials visit such people?

Before we visited our friend he had my brother advise us to go to the Resident's reception that we ourselves had more or less planned to do. 'The R. was longing to see us,' he said, but our brother did not tell us this, only that we had to go to the reception. We did go, with Father.

Was there any magic at work? Really, the R. received us in an extraordinarily hearty manner. It was obvious that he was in an excellent mood and he made it obvious that he liked us. He told his guests that on an earlier occasion he had taken a long walk with us in the moonlight. When were we planning to go to for a walk with him again? In a surge of cordiality he came up to me and said loudly, so that everyone could hear it: 'You should come here often. Yes, when your brother-in-law is wedono. When Darso becomes Regent of Pasuruan, then your brother-in-law will fill his place in Wirosari. He works well and is highly recommended. You really should come here often, yes?'[393]

[393] This account of the power residing in the arbitrary whim of all-powerful European residents typified a colonial practice that was rapidly coming under review under pressure from both colonial reformers concerned to modernize colonial administration and from a new generation of Western-educated Indonesians.

To these hearty words that contained such a good omen for my brother-in-law I responded without a word: not nice and perhaps also impolite. I merely looked at him and perhaps the look in my eye reflected something of what I was thinking: 'What are you hatching now?' I had asked nothing, nor said anything, he had said and promised it himself. I had never spoken to him about our boys, this was the first time and it was not I, but he, who spoke and I had not responded to it.

He did not seem to notice our indifference, at least it did not seem to upset him. When the reception had ended and we also wanted to take our leave, he detained us, we had to stay for dinner. We stayed and oh, how sweet he was! He no doubt wanted to make us forget what had happened. Later, at dinner, we apologized that we had left all the meat dishes since we were vegetarian. And that started something. How we were teased and ridiculed, we had expected it and thus retained our composure under this attack. The R. said simply that I was mad. He had to know where I had got this foolishness from, from a book or from someone? 'Oh, I know, you got it from van Kol. Van Kol has made you crazy. Regent, she must marry!'

'Be careful no one else gets to hear of it. Should they find out, no one will want you, and it would be such a pity if you did not marry, you girls are so sweet.' (prosit !) I bowed briefly and said that everyone could know of it. He shook his head and again declared I was crazy. That man absolutely wants to see us married.

We must be either thoroughly demoralized or we have become a degree more elevated that we were able to remain so utterly calm, could listen with such indifference to things which were actually quite indelicate. It did not affect us, just slid off our back like water off an oilcloth. Later, when others criticized us, he supported us. We just let them talk and listened, smiling. What use, after all, is it to speak, if one knows beforehand that one could not possibly agree. That would just be a waste of words. He wanted me to write to him at length about this. In the end he had to admit: 'Basically you are correct. You see, if I were married to you, it would have made me totally crazy. I am already crazy, mad, foolish.'

I think that he was annoyed that he had to respect us. (We are not frugal with giving our opinions). That evening he did not eat beefsteak, no doubt because he had a toothache. At first he said: 'I can understand that you do not eat pork, but that you abstain totally from eating meat, that I cannot accept.' He would like to issue a decree that everyone had to eat meat. 'Do so,' I said, 'and then the government can begin by providing the people with cattle.'

He did have to acknowledge, nevertheless, that we showed no detrimental effects from being vegetarian, we appeared just as fresh and healthy as always. That is what an opponent of vegetarianism says, Moeke, are you satisfied now? It is really doing us good both physically and morally and we are happy that we can live so simply. Oh, what meaningless arguments are brought forward against vegetarianism. Why is there such opposition to it? We do not want to convert anyone. Something like that one has to want to do for oneself, from a sense of conviction. [394]

'Come on, can't you be excused from it this once, at least by paying a fine or something?'

Now the R. can see that what we want seriously we do seriously and that laughter or ridicule has very little effect on us. A few days later we met him again, he had someone staying and he told him that we were vegetarian. 'When she marries, her husband will die.' I was on the point of saying something but, because of the guest who I did not know, I limited myself to asking him if he really meant in all seriousness that the graves were all full of vegetarians or only of old meat eaters! And he was not able to reply.

The next time we also talked about religion and when expressing our admiration for those who left hearth and home, family and friends, to devote themselves to a labour of love in strange lands, among a strange people, we made it known that we would gladly live for a time in an atmosphere of love in the service of a holy cause. 'Oh, then you would no doubt become a Christian. For us, this would be a good thing. Pity us if you became a fanatical Mohammedan and you preached a holy war, then you would cast us all into the sea.'[395]

Moeke will never have to fear that I would ever preach a holy war. For that reason we have for a long time turned our backs totally against religion because we see so much lovelessness under the banner of religion. Only gradually did we come to see that it was not the religion that was without love, but that it was the people who made ugly what was originally divinely beautiful.

The most beautiful and the most elevated religion we think is: Love. And does one absolutely have to be a Christian to be able to live according to that

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394 Vegetarianism was a new fashion in the Netherlands. The van Kols, already known to be advocates of spiritualism, another fashionable pursuit, as well as being socialists and feminists, were also advocates of vegetarianism, as was Stella. Kartini here reveals she had also adopted the practice while earlier she had also indicated her fascination with séances and spiritualism.

395 The resident was here expressing a generally held view that underpinned colonial policy to support Christian missionary activity in the Outer Islands and curtail the expansion of Islamic states, notably Aceh and Makassar.

divine commandment? The Buddhist, the Brahmin, the Jew, the Muslim, even the Heathen, can also live a life of love.

If only Mr Sijthoff knew with whom we were exchanging a personal correspondence. Would he then still say: 'You will become a Christian if you consort with Christians.'[396]

There is one thing in which I have become totally involved, in which I completely lose myself and I do so regularly: beautiful music. One can get us to do anything as long as we are filled with music. And if we have to do something that necessitates much courage, then we would first want to saturate ourselves with some heavenly music. That is the effect music has on us. Yet, there was once an occasion when we were totally indifferent to it – at the marriage of our dear heart, we were like stone statues.

Usually we have to control ourselves to prevent our fingers from playing to the tones of the gamelan that send fiery currents through our veins. The younger sisters also have this same feeling when listening to beautiful gamelan music. As children we only learned dancing, entirely on our own initiative. When we could barely walk we began moving our arms, hands and body to the sounds of the gamelan.

And as little tots it had been our dream to become dancers. Often Moeder would dress me as a dancer and then I would dance until I was exhausted. Oh sweet innocence – trustingly we nestled in the arms of dancers, we admired their art and they were very kind to us. Later, much, much later, we came to understand what they were, those women whom we so much admired and we despised the art because of the person, and we were ashamed of ourselves that we had ever wanted to become dancers.[397]

And much later still, we learned to separate the art from the performer – we are constantly learning. It should be totally indifferent to us what kind of person it is in the case of Couperus, Borel, etc., etc.; we must only honour the artist in them, or, in Multatuli's case, the genius.[398]

As I have said somewhere already, we long to meet people of different races, beliefs and perspectives. The last occasion that we were in Semarang we met several Said families.[399] My brother knows very many – all good and pious people. He brought us into contact with, amongst others, the head of the Arabic community, and we discovered that we were related. Through questioning each other, we discovered that his family, a grandfather, was a good friend

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396 Kartini was aware that Stella was Jewish and may have known that Mr Abendanon was also.
397 The reference is to professional dancers who also offered sexual favours.
398 Each of these famous Dutch authors led less than perfect private lives.
399 The name Said indicates this was an Arabic family.

of ours, his father and uncle were playmates of father and his brothers and of grandfather's adopted sons. Through circumstances, the friends lost contact until just recently it happened that the grandchildren were brought together again.

'Was this the reason that I felt so attracted to Raden Mas and that my heart kept reaching to him?'

It is nice to be able to take a look into a strange interior and so much of it appealed to us. We have had that experience before with people of other races totally unknown to us but who themselves, or whose parents, had known our grandfather. In this way we also got to know people in the Moorish community whose parents were friends of our grandfather. We have always been received there in a most cordial fashion.

Recently one of his sons married a Moorish girl. We attended the wedding; many of the traditional practices have now been lost so that my description of such a marriage is now no longer accurate. But then, that is now so old. I wrote it as a child and several years ago it appeared in the *Tijdschrift voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde van N.I.*[400] I am not sure whether I should be pleased that some of the traditional customs have been lost when I see what they have been replaced with. That imitation European! – and if only it were done <u>well</u> – stuck onto the fabric of tradition gives a most ludicrous impression. It is quite understandable that it calls out the mirth of Europeans. The important Koja[401] now considers it beneath his dignity on his wedding day to give his young wife the traditional sirih in its decorative golden case at the formal meeting. The bridegroom who we recently saw gave his bride a posy of garish artificial flowers from which gaudy ribbons were trailing. It was not kenanga, cepaka or melati that decorated their bridal attire, but garish artificial flowers. After all, they were European, weren't they?

But we can unhesitatingly rejoice at the fact that one tradition has been trampled underfoot. With them it is a custom that in the first 3 days after the wedding, the young couple are not allowed out of the house. Now the parents who were here only briefly wanted to bring the married couple to visit us, but how was this possible, the required 3 days would not yet have passed.

How surprised and overjoyed we were then when we heard him tell his wife: 'Tomorrow evening I will bring the married couple to the Kabupaten.'

'How is that possible, three days have not yet passed. That is not allowed, is it?' his wife responded. And the Koja replied: 'The Regent says that that

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400 This was her article published in *Bijdragen* in 1899, 'Het Huwelijk bij de Kodjas' (Marriage amongst the Koja).

401 Koja, literally Muslim traders of Arabic or Indian origin.

rule is merely tradition. Tradition does not compel, happiness or unhappiness is caused by people themselves. If they are at peace within themselves, then they can put tradition aside and if all goes well with them, then it is of no consequence. My heart tells me to follow the Regent. It will be all right. Nothing will happen.'

Our eyes sparkled at him, we could have squeezed his hand. So he too, this oriental,[402] stuck in the old traditions, acknowledges that adat is nothing but habituated practices that one can put aside like an old rug if it no longer serves one's purposes and that adat itself has nothing to do with one's success in life.

Father had said it, and the Koja reiterated those words wholeheartedly. And indeed, he and his wife brought the young couple to us the following evening. And they would maintain this resolution even in Semarang. This action will no doubt have raised some eyebrows in the Moorish community but the one who did it was important, people will soon stop talking and follow this example.

We were so pleased about it that we worked with a happy heart to prepare a fine dinner for them. They had asked us to regard them not as friends, but as members of the family. The Saids, with whom we had made an acquaintance in Semarang, would not believe that we did not have Arab blood in our veins. 'Even were you to deny it, your eyes would give you away, they are not Javanese eyes but eyes of the descendants of Rasul Allah (Mohammed). You must be a descendant of a Said.'

It is possible. I believe that Father has also said something like this, I will ask him one day. I do not have the energy to consult the book with the family tree myself. We received this recently but have not yet looked at it, the very sight of it makes me dizzy. It really does not concern me from which house etc. we are descended. What is it in our ancestry that we have to be proud of? Does not the convict who works on the road over there have ancestors, grandparents, who lived at the same time as ours? His family is just as old as ours. He had not fallen out of the sky, or come out of the ground, but had come from parents just as we had.

But to return to what the Said said: it is quite possible that we have some of their blood in our veins. One can see quite clearly with father that he does not have a pure Javanese face, and especially the nose is not that of a Javanese. Our Soematri also has an Arab face, at home we call her the Raden Ajeng Sripah.[403] Also our oldest brother has an Arab face. When during the recent

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402 Under colonial law, Arabs were included in the category of Vreemde Oosterlingen (Foreign orientals).

403 A colloquial term used as a reference to an Arab woman.

Lebaran he, together with other officials, dressed up as Arabs at the request of the Regent to pray at the mosque, he was immediately surrounded by real Arabs who cordially welcomed him and asked him where the Said came from, and when, because they had not seen him before.

And at first we did not understand why people looked at us the way they did when we drove through the Arab quarter in Sem[arang]. They thought we were of the same race and they were curious to know who these strange Sripahs were. Later, when they heard we were Javanese, they said what we told you on the previous page.

What does Moeke say about this? May I still be your little girl, if it should appear that I am not a pure Javanese? Arabs also can love with their whole heart, and be good.

We think it is wonderful to have friends amongst all races. Only with Chinese we do not have any contact. Father does not allow it to my great regret because I would also like to get to know that people without prejudice. What we know of this unfortunate and despised people is mostly bad. We cannot and will not accept that nothing beautiful, noble and great can be found in that race. I am suddenly reminded of the Chinese who put at the disposal of the government a hundred thousand gilders to help reduce the plight of the people when our land was threatened by drought.

No, we do not share the general contempt of the Chinese. There are quite assuredly noble hearts and great souls amongst them. From a minister who had witnessed the disasters in Ambon we heard that the Chinese had shown themselves to be particularly charitable towards the unfortunate victims. Both Europeans and Natives were heavily indebted to some Chinese merchants because, when all goods had gone up in price, the pigtailed retailers continued to provide regular supplies of everything at the same price. And a ship that had been sent there to provide assistance bought up everything at the markets that the people needed.

How many wagonloads of rice were not provided to the Government by the daughters of Oei Tjing Ham and several other Chinese to feed the needy in Semarang?[404]

There are European millionaires who extract gold from our needy land aren't there? Why did such help only come from the despised Chinese? Why does help not come in abundance from those Europeans? It is they who should help, I believe, for we are not the subjects of the Chinese. It is generally said the daughters of the millionaire leader, Oei Tjing Ham, are highly cultivated

404 Kartini previously described her visit to his famous villa and garden.

ladies. They are said to speak modern languages fluently. It is said that one of these girls wants to go to Europe to study to be lawyer.

Everyone knows that family except us.

Yet we also have a Chinese brother, Father's adopted son. He calls our parents Father and Mother, and us – brother and sister. The situation is this: when Father was still a wedono there was a well-to-do Chinese living in the area who had 9 children who had all died soon after birth. The tenth child was expected, the parents went to our parents and gave them the yet-to-be-born son. Father and Mother accepted it. When it was born, they brought the child to us and Father gave him a name after which the parents received our child back to raise him. And as it happened, the little Chinese grew rapidly. He is now married and is a father. He is very attached to our parents and did not want to marry without the permission of his adopted parents. His first child died and now he has given the second child to our brother who gave his foster child a Native name.

Strange things happen in the Native world. In this way Mama has gained many 'adopted' children. Ma gave two mortally ill children, who had been brought to her by their mother, the name of Oerip (life); both have now grown up. What is at work here: auto-suggestion?

Oh Moeke, what a mile-long letter I have written you. You will need days to work your way through it. I will not trouble you with one again for some time, be assured.

Oh, you can never imagine what I heard. Mimi, the little Mimi of the Regent of Ciamis, has become a mother. What do you think of that, that little one and a mother! That child with a child, her child, in her arms. Yo, the R.A. of Serang, is also a mother. But about Mimi, what do you think of that?

But with her older sister it was even worse, I have no words for it, she married in her 11th year, when she was 12 she became a mother and of course the child died. We heard this from Yo and Mimi themselves who told us this with a certain pride. Married so young – so desired – what an honour. When she was 13, the child expected another child, fell out of a carriage and became very ill! At the moment she is apparently very weak – the doctor has been excavating and cutting in her body. Poor thing, terrible parents.

We heard the following from the daughter of the Resident of Cheribon and which her father himself witnessed and is prepared to affirm on oath. There was going to be a festivity at the home of the Regent of Ciamis, people were at the Kabupaten partaking of rijsttafel, the R.A. who was expecting, asked permission to leave the table. After a while she came back, looking a little pale. In her arms she carried … the child she had just given birth to. Resident Mesman sat

looking on, shocked … the meal proceeded in the presence of the hostess. It is unbelievable, R. Mesman will swear to it … Mad, mad country, this Indies!

And now, goodbye Moeske! Do not be angry that I have detained you for so long! Once again thank you for everything. To you and Mijnheer and to your sister, our heartiest greetings and for yourself, be warmly kissed by your daughters

R. and K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

23 December 1902

My dear friends,
What a dreadful calamity you have experienced! Poor, poor Edie and poor, dear parents! We were horrified when we read of the terrible accident. Our eyes filled with tears and our hearts were and are still filled with grief. If it affected *us* this way, how then must it have affected you, the parents?

We feel, live and suffer with you. We are with you in our thoughts and with our poor brother. Where is he at the moment and where are you? In Sumatra or in Batavia? We wished that we were able, like our thoughts, to fly, we would so dearly like to be with you so that we could, with everything we have, in actual fact help carry this cross with you. We have already so often nursed ill people, and we would not be in the way, as long as we could be with you.

How is the poor boy? What was the prognosis of the doctors? Will Edie be brought to you or will you go to him? God grant that his eye will be spared him, and that he will soon recover. Poor, poor boy – there, my eyes are becoming moist again. It is so terrible for such a <u>young</u> person to perhaps have to lose an eye. I pray with my whole heart that my dear friend may be spared this tragedy. Should this nevertheless happen, then we earnestly pray that God may stand by him and teach him to take his cross and bear it. We hope fervently that this dreadful thing will not happen.

Poor Parents, we can well imagine what torment of anxiety and unrest you are experiencing! May a light soon shine again in this darkness! This morning we had just been speaking about all of you and in particular about Edie – we were telling my sister about him and what he was doing etc., etc. and then this afternoon your letter arrived with that tragic news. My sisters are also greatly saddened by it. Our parents both want you to know how sorry they are about what has happened and fervently hope that your son may speedily recover and that nothing else may happen to him.

Should you be with him, tell him how much the accident has upset his sisters and that they are with him in their thoughts. Squeeze his hand warmly on our behalf.

You too, dear Parents, we embrace. God be with you and protect you from further calamity.

With all my love,
Kartini

Have received your postal order for *f*40, thank you.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

30 December 1902

My dearest, my own Moedertje,

The old year is ending so tragically for all of you and the New Year commences in such unfortunate circumstances that, in some sense, it would appear to be a mockery to offer you felicitations for the first of January. But yet, with the commencement of a new year we should not neglect a warm greeting and hearty handshake for all of you from your brown children, if only to let you know once more that they have not forgotten you, but indeed hold you dear in their thoughts.

God grant that the New Year brings my dear friends better fortune than did the old. Moeke, dearest Moeke, how I would wish that things were <u>different</u>, that you could celebrate a <u>happy</u> New Year's eve. Oh why, why should it be? Why should such a terrible accident strike that dear boy, why particularly him, who is so noble, and always wants to do what is good?

Perhaps that is just why it had to happen to him. Nothing must be perfect, after all, only God is perfect, and then, those whom one loves, one chastises. No doubt God gave this heavy test specifically to your son so that his soul would become more pure, noble and great, so that it would stretch out its wings even more vigorously to take it to its godly origins.

Suffering purifies or destroys. The same fire that destroys wood purifies gold. Didi will be purified by the fire because his heart is of <u>gold</u>.

How is he now, Moeke? We have been unable to put either him or you both from our minds for a single moment since we heard that fateful news. And we have been constantly praying: 'May all go well with him, and God give them energy, strength and comfort.' We are poor comforters, we can merely comfort with our love, our empathy, our sympathy for your suffering.

Recently we read in the paper that both Didi's eyes had been affected, but that is not correct is it, Moeke? How otherwise could he have telegraphed you himself?

We cannot bear to look at the photograph since the accident without feeling heartbroken. Poor, poor boy! Give him all our love and tell him we share totally in his suffering.

Late at night.

This afternoon I read in the newspaper that you had both left for Sawah Lunto. So Edie is not able to be moved to Batavia yet! How many questions arise in my head on reading this news. Questions which I would gladly have answered but which will have to remain unanswered. How is he Moeke? Where is he? If it is at all possible send me a card with just a single word saying how he is, I beg you. It is no exaggeration when I tell you that we hunger for information about him. Poor, dear Parents, we would so desperately like to do something for you to lighten your burden. But we are totally powerless, we can only think of you with deep love and sympathize with you.

This afternoon, the mail brought letters, etc., from Holland, from friends with good tidings for the two of us. Our situation is looking very positive, a promise has been officially given in the parliamentary session of 26 Nov.: 'that should the means for completing our education in the Indies be lacking, the minister is prepared to make an exception and offer a subsidy for undertaking such education in the Netherlands.'[405]

More about this later, when we know how our brother Edie is going. It is now not the time to talk to you about our affairs but because you had asked so insistently that we inform you immediately if news arrived from Heer van Kol, and because we also know of how much interest this is to you, I am briefly passing on the news to you. Perhaps it may also provide a diversion, also for brother Edie, who shares our hopes and desires with such interest.

It is now New Year's Eve, and the letter has not yet been sent. Just then father came to bring me the newspaper and pointed out an item under telegraphic communications: 'The Director of E[ducation], R[eligion] and I[ndustry] is authorized, should his duties in the Department permit, to travel to Madura, Surabaya, Madiun and Kediri and possibly also to Semarang and Rembang, in the interests of the salt monopoly.' And Father said: 'Write to Mevrouw Abendanon and ask them to stop by at Jepara in the course of their journey and to call in on us.'

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[405] By the time Kartini received this letter the decision had already been taken in the Dutch parliament to provide a scholarship.

How eager I was to carry out this task! Oh Moeke, if only the both of you were able to come! How divine that would be! Will this remain a dream or is there a possibility that this may eventuate? If that should be the case, oh Moeke, how merciful Heaven would be to us! Should you both be in our vicinity then we have to have you here, that is self evident and you will promise us that, won't you, Moeke? Just imagine, that we should go to Buitenzorg and not come to visit you, how mean you would think us!

But, what am I saying, forgive me dearest. The idea of seeing you both again and having you with us is so heavenly, and made me so happy, that for a moment I forgot the sad circumstances which you are experiencing at the moment.

How egotistical of me to be talking of travelling and coming here while you must be with your poor boy. Forgive me, my longing for you is so great, that the idea of perhaps seeing you again made me for a moment forget everything, even that which has my utmost attention.

We have received photographs of Nellie and her children, one of them is the same as that published in the *Holl. Revue*. I am coming to like her more and more, she is someone who one can become very fond of, who gives guidance and offers advice in such a frank and pleasant way. You must read her letters and writings, they are so readable. And by conducting a friendly correspondence with her we are supposed to be going to confession with the Devil!

Yes of course, lightning is most likely to hit the highest points, those that rise above everything else. I have told her much about my Moeke and about Mijnheer and Edie. I have to tell those who I am fond of about my treasures: they make me so rich and so extremely happy.

And now dearest, goodnight. My best wishes for Edie. Warmly squeeze his hand from us both. For you both, kindest regards from my parents and for yourself a big kiss from sister R and your own little daughter

K.

LETTERS 1903

Introduction

The year 1903 brings the story of Kartini's life to a momentous climax. It begins with a reference to Kartini's case being brought to the attention of the Dutch parliament by Henri van Kol. It ends, one month after her marriage with, apparently, a complete acceptance of an entirely different life:

> I have met my equal – no, in many ways my superior. How small and insignificant I feel beside him. If all Regents perceived their duty and life in general as he then this island would be the most flourishing and the most prosperous in the whole world.
>
> Everything that had been presented to me as being of beauty and refinement I see realized here. The dreams I am still dreaming were already put into practice years ago by him, or already thought of by him. When we are together I am moved so often by the fact that we are so much at one in our feelings, thoughts and ideas (11 December 1903).

A conventional framing of Kartini's history in terms of a tragedy has tended to interpret the optimistic tone of this and the remaining extant correspondence from 1904 as a polite disguise of an inner suffering. Equally, however, Kartini could be taken at her word. The Dutch educated Djojo Adiningrat, much like her own father, who was also polygamous, was highly regarded as an enlightened Javanese leader committed to reform.

An interpretation that Kartini's life's ambitions were destroyed by an arranged marriage appeared to receive confirmation with the publication in 1987 of the unexpurgated collection of letters that Kartini wrote to Rosa Abendanon. This created a sensation when it was discovered that Kartini was aware that her husband-to-be had several co-wives and that she had indeed written excruciatingly agonized letters to Rosa describing her distress and the mysterious circumstances surrounding the proposal of marriage. Initially unable to reveal the terrible secret, the searing emotion builds over ten days in a series of letters between 4 and 14 July, several of which may have been co-written by her sister Roekmini because of Kartini's emotional condition. The last of these letters releases a torrent of pain:

> My crown has fallen from my head. My golden illusions of purity and chastity lie shattered in the dust. It was my pride, my glory, that I was a pure, proud girl loved by my Moedertje as if I were her own child. Now I am nothing more than all the rest, I am like thousands of others who I had wanted to help but whose number I have now merely come to increase.
>
> O God, my God have pity on me! Give me the strength to carry my cross. Can I still be your daughter, without a crown, without golden illusions? O God, must this really happen? Is this Your will? Oh, if it was a temptation, oh pity me, pity me! (14 July 1903)

Considered objectively, it could be argued that the emotional turmoil Kartini undoubtedly felt and described here related more to a sense of shame. Kartini precedes this emotional outburst with the bitter rhetorical question: 'Do you know the nature of my wonderful happiness, my humiliation, my shame?' The shame she admits lay in the fact that her acceptance of a Javanese marriage made her 'just like the rest'. What, arguably, is central here was the sense that the feminist persona she had for so long projected in her correspondence with Rosa and others had now been destroyed.

The debate concerning 'the tragedy of Kartini' will doubtless continue since her arranged marriage is only one element in the broader sense of 'tragedy'. The second, of course, is the simultaneous and related end to her aspirations for further study revealed in the correspondence. The hope of being able to salvage this aspiration from the altered circumstances also quickly fades, when the realization of the impossibility of studying in Batavia – as Abendanon had proposed and had arranged funding for, and which Kartini for a time believed might still have been possible – became clear to Kartini. Studying in Batavia was not possible because:

> slowly it entered our consciousness that at this time it is still not possible for a young Native girl to be independent, to work independently, in public. A great danger besets her from the direction of men. For a Javanese man, no woman is too ugly, that we now know…
>
> In our traditional clothing we, as independent young girls, would not be safe anywhere in public. (14 July 1903).

Once again, and for the last time, this leads her to reiterate that 'Only if we were in Europe would we be completely free'.

In practical terms, Kartini also expressed the potential advantages of marriage. Despite what had now become inevitable, she had made her acceptance

of the marriage proposal conditional, as the inclusion of a letter by Roekmini (15 July) makes clear, and Kartini draws some comfort from the fact that she would be able to continue her Jepara school experiment (and her support of Javanese craftwork) later in Rembang as well as to continue her reading and writing. The wedding when it finally took place in November significantly defied tradition and, in comparison with the description of her sister's wedding, was enacted as a very modern affair stripped of its feudal rites.

The year, however, had begun in much brighter circumstances with Kartini finally setting out in two extended documents directed, respectively, to the Dutch and colonial governments, the justifications underpinning her aspirations for undertaking further education (see elsewhere in this volume). In them she summarized all the arguments she had previously advanced in letters to Rosa and others, and in the brief memorandum she prepared earlier for Henri van Kol. But in the time between writing these two documents there occurred the event that irrevocably changed the direction of Kartini's plans. The visit by Abendanon to Jepara (referred to in the last letter of 1902) was apparently with the sole aim of convincing Kartini to change her mind regarding her plan to study in the Netherlands for which they now both knew funding had been secured (Kartini, 25 January 1903). (Whether Rosa, who at the time was preoccupied with her injured son in Sumatra, knew of his 'mission' is unclear.) Having gained Kartini's agreement, Abendanon proceeded to advise Kartini on preparing a petition directed to the colonial government for funding to enable her to undertake a teacher training and first aid course – and domestic science and art and drawing courses for her sister Roekmini – in Batavia for which he prepared the requisite official support. As noted in the general Introduction, her application, forwarded via the regional administration was also supported by Resident Sijthoff who emphasized that he would only support teacher training in Batavia and not her initial intention of studying in Europe.

The full extent of the colonial machinations that shaped Kartini's future remains unclear: a combination of what can perhaps be interpreted as Abendanon's 'good intentions' and the specific opposition to her plans on the part of both the colonial and Javanese establishment were both implicated in denying Kartini the possibility of studying in Europe – and in the circumstance that resulted in her arranged marriage.

Within these constraints, however, it is at least clear that Kartini believed she could make the best of the situation in which she now found herself. In a letter to EC Abendanon (27 January) Kartini recounts the details of her discussion with his father. It should be remembered that this new plan to

become a teacher and to undertake training in Batavia was being developed before there was mention of a marriage proposal, and demonstrates her insistence on owning, and not just accepting, Abendanon's recommendation. Nevertheless, it was only belatedly that she revealed the change in direction – perhaps with some embarrassment – to Stella (23 April).

In the end Kartini was able to justify the decision not to proceed with plans to study in the Netherlands by recognizing that she would be in a stronger position as Raden Ayu, the formal wife of a respected regent. He had, after all, formally agreed to her conditions, to allow her continue her educational activities and to support her in her work to implement the kinds of social changes she had long discussed. This, however, was predicated on her living a long life – and living with the condition of polygamy.

To Mijnheer and Mevrouw van Kol

3 January 1903

My highly esteemed and dear friends

How can we thank you enough for what you wrote in your last letter and for what was contained in the parliamentary report of 26 November.[1] We will never be able to be sufficiently grateful for what you have done for us. The debt that we have to you can never be repaid; we will take it with us to the next world.

Oh, how can I describe the stream of thoughts that flowed through me when I read, through a flood of tears, both your letter and the sections of the report that were underlined.

God is great, God is almighty, God is Love.

This is a heavenly blessing. We two faced each other without seeing each other, our thoughts wafted far above our heads, drifted to far-off lands, to friends far away, to times, events that the future still keeps hidden from us. Both of us thought and felt the same thing at that moment. Together with a feeling of unutterable gratitude there was a sadness, a feeling of deep melancholy in our hearts. We were sad because we were unable to immediately thank those loyal, noble souls, to shake the hands of our friends who had brought us this great joy, or embrace them.

We were also sad because of the many dear and beloved hearts that would be severely wounded by the same joyful tidings we greeted with such gratitude.

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1 See Kartini's letter of 30 December 1902. On 17 December 1902 Henri van Kol had also presented a lecture on 'the position of the woman in our East Indies colonies'.

Poor, poor parents. The fulfilment of our dearest wish means for them that there will be a separation from their children, it will mean so much grief. It will be bitterly, bitterly hard for them once the ship, which will tear their dear ones from their heart and take them to a far-off, foreign land, has steamed away. Will they return unscathed? Will they see their parents again? They are so closely attached to us, especially my father to me because I remind him of his mother and in whom he sees his own likeness.

God comfort the poor, grief-stricken, beloved hearts when the time comes. It is egotistical but we do hope this time will come.

We will not be able to get the petition ready in the next few weeks: for the moment we are not allowed to see the friend who is going to help us with this. He has had a terrible accident – actually his son – but it has affected him very badly. The A family is now in Sawah Lunto with their son, who is a mining engineer, who has been wounded in his right eye by the sudden explosion of a percussion cap, and has probably lost the sight of that eye. Poor boy, and poor parents. We have been badly affected by that accident – we are so fond of the parents and he is like a brother to us. He is such a dear, kind, and cultured boy. As well as being intelligent, he has a fine, sweet, noble soul. He is also very fond of the land of his sisters, which is also the land of his birth, and he has a warm heart for our people. The thoughts that I pointed out in that letter that you published in *Oost en West* are his. We don't know how things are with that poor boy at the moment and we are waiting impatiently for news about him. I briefly let the family know the good news …

Our brother, Stella, and all the friends will no doubt be happy that your noble efforts have been crowned with such success. We were greatly moved when we read the speech in which you called on the help of the Government for a few children of the people whose interests you had so taken to heart, followed by the response of the Minister and then your reply to that!

Had the Government said 'No' then we would have had to go to Paris, where an alternative solution has been offered by one of the largest and most influential convents there. People had promised my brother that the nuns would care for us like mothers.[2]

I express to you my deepest thanks from the bottom of my heart and press your hand. And, like Mevrouw van Kol, we hope that the future will show that those to whom you have given your attention and for whom you have worked will not prove unworthy. Take pleasure in your noble work, my Friend.

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[2] This paragraph was included in Bouman (1954), 53–54 and reproduced in Allard (1976), 430.

We have already struggled and suffered for this for so long. And we believe that yet more serious disturbances await us before we will be able to leave all that unpleasantness, and also that which is dear to us, behind us to steam away to the far-off land that we expect will prepare us for the task we believe we will be going to fulfil.

One does not have to have done bad things to another, or made life difficult for someone to attract fierce enemies. People are already trying to provoke the family to oppose our plans. 'It is not pantes that we want to go to Holland'. And: 'What a scandal to want to go there at someone else's expense.'

And people are saying other things, that the purpose of our going to H. is 'we want to catch a Hollander there.' This has been said more than once: 'We want to marry a Hollander!' On one occasion it was said by someone during dinner at the home of a family member of ours – and by a European. People were amusing themselves at our expense and someone even said it was 'to make life easy for ourselves.' People were so kind as to explain this to mother in graphic detail; she took it very much to heart. There was a so-called friend of ours at this particular dinner party who, although time and again he had declared to be, oh, so fond of us, simply let this mud be thrown at us. So we have certainly already had some experience that we might be able to draw on.[3]

Even less pleasant things were said to me personally which we regard as too base to bother to defend ourselves from. And people become even more angry when we remained completely calm…

* * * *

… in no time they would all become Muslims like the original population when they married Muslim men or women.' This is just what you said. He also said, just like you, that the people there appear much like a Japanese type. It was a very pleasant hour. I hope that he will come here again often, he is a foreigner, a Russian from Moscow.[4]

I recently received a long letter from Dr Adriani on topics that will also interest you. I told him what you have done for us and he is very happy about this. He wrote, amongst other things: 'What Mevrouw van Kol has allowed you to see is that which is the essence of all religions: a knowledge of God as a person, not just a concept, not the Good but The Good!'

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3 This is reminiscent of Kartini's criticism of resident Sijthoff, who is probably the person Kartini is referring to here.

4 This incomplete paragraph was recovered from editorial deletions made to the letter in 1911. There is no indication who might be referred to.

Many beautiful and serious things are mentioned in his letter. I would love to read and discuss these with you. I still have to write him a reply. Somewhere he says: 'I don't see it any differently: Christianity brings no one happiness – it is only the personal relationship with God that gives Christianity its significance.'

Recently we spoke with a European about religion. When I said that I would love to live for a while in a Native Christian community, live in the home of a missionary, for instance at Mojowarno, in order to spend time in an environment of pure, holy refreshing love, I was told: 'Oh, then you will become a Christian. For us it would be better if one became a Christian: heaven help us if one became a fanatical Muslim – then you would be no doubt preaching a holy war.'

There are those who are jealous of the fact that I write and I have been advised by someone to desist from this. It is not 'pantes' for a girl to write for a public audience. 'O, terrible, an unmarried woman whose name is bandied about in public. If she was married then perhaps.' A woman who does not have a husband, may not do anything except reach out with both hands when some highly-prized article is sent to her. Oh, poor me! We shall see what the single woman can achieve. A woman who does not marry is ridiculous. She wants to be admired by many men instead of by one…

To Mijnheer Abendanon

14 January 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

Father recently received your postcard from Fort de Kock and, on his behalf and on behalf of my whole family, I wish to thank you very much for your kind good wishes.

On the same afternoon Father received your postcard, we read in the paper that you had returned to Batavia last Wednesday.

I had wanted to write to you immediately but essential letters had to be written to catch the mail which closed that evening; the following morning, Sunday, Heer v. Lawick v. P. came and after his departure, on Monday morning, my sister Kartinah became ill. She was very unwell last night but now, thank God, she has recovered.

I will not need to convince you of how grieved we all were about the terrible accident your son experienced. We have shared your suffering and have had you in our thoughts during this time. Poor, poor boy, my heart was broken

when I read the desperate letter from his dear mother and at the same time this image came to my mind: Edie, far from his family, suffering terrible pain, physically and morally, his parents in despair, not knowing what to do – their child, so far away, unreachable at that moment and for the next few days, and knowing him to be suffering and in danger.

A deep sigh of 'Thank God' escaped me when I read that Edie had himself telegraphed. Dear boy; to be concerned, while in such pain, to reassure his parents. My sister and I were very moved by that fact; both of us have become fond of him, and it is as if with each letter from him we are being brought closer together.

We have not been able to write to him since his accident; we would only have made him upset but we have constantly had to think of him and since that tragic event, not a day has passed when we have not asked each other: 'How will Edie be feeling?' We look forward anxiously to news of him which Moedertje will no doubt send us, as soon as Her Ladyship has the opportunity.

How was he when you left him? If sincere hopes and wishes have any influence, then, given the circumstances, things must be all right. We certainly will not have to tell you how we are praying with heart and soul for his speedy recovery. His left eye was completely unaffected, wasn't it? Till now I have been unable to look at his photograph, which is hanging over our writing table, without a feeling of sadness coming over me.

'Mandekna semono bae, muga ing buri lestari ginanjar wilujeng, ora ana rubida sawiji apa'[5] – this is a prayer which constantly rises up in me from the depths of my heart.

We have written three letters to your wife, we hope they have arrived. In one of them we briefly told her the good news, passed on to us by friends and by a report from parliament of 26 Nov. You yourself will have read that report and have concluded that our cause is now looking hopeful. A promise has been officially given: 'that, if the means for completing our education in the Indies are not available, the minister is prepared, by way of an exception, to provide a subsidy for an education in the Netherlands.'

Mevrouw van Kol is of the opinion that a petition is now the obvious procedure; we, however, would rather wait until we receive further news about the situation and this has been promised us by others. When things have progressed a little further then Heer van Overveldt, who has come to an agreement with

[5] Translation: However insignificant, my hope is that the future brings much good and that nothing will be lacking.

Heer van Kol about how they will proceed together in consultation, will go to the minister to discuss the means by which this decision would be enacted.[6]

Don't you think, also, that this would be better? If a petition has to be prepared, then we would hope to be able to come to you for assistance and support. We have never presented a petition and do not know how to put one together. As we have heard recently, an unfortunate choice of expression could ruin an entire petition. May we then apply to you when the time comes?

Yesterday we again read in the paper that you would very shortly be making an official trip to the east and will also be visiting Semarang and Rembang. We hope this news is correct. My parents requested me to kindly ask you to visit Jepara during your proposed trip and to call in on us. We would so much enjoy this and would be very, very grateful to you. We very much hope that you want to and will be able to accommodate our pressing request and that, in that case, 'a certain someone' will also accompany you. Oh, how <u>happy</u> we would be.

An hour of quiet conversation is worth more than the longest and most detailed letter. So much can be said in conversation and one can better explain what one is thinking and what one wants. We will pray regularly every day for this <u>good fortune</u>.[7]

I also want to ask something of you. We would very much like more information about the Agricultural School that will be opened in Buitenzorg this coming July.

Will students there be prepared for a government position? A younger brother of ours who is now attending the H.B.S. at Semarang in the 3rd year and hopes this year to go to the 4th year, would very much like to obtain a position with the Department of Forests, and be trained as forester.[8] But there is no provision for this at Buitenzorg, is there? In any event, is one trained for a government position at the Agricultural School? Apparently 5 scholarships will be provided each year; what conditions are attached to gaining such a scholarship? You would make me very happy if in some way you could provide me with this much desired information and I would be very grateful to you.

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6 Kartini recognizes here that by appealing directly to the Dutch parliament she is bypassing the colonial bureaucracy. This in itself represented an important factor shaping the ultimate outcome.

7 When it took place later, this meeting was to have more significance than she anticipated.

8 This is a reference to her younger brother, Moelijono. Expanding areas of colonial public service, such as agriculture directed at 'native welfare' provided a new Western educated generation to enter appropriate occupations outside the highly politicized Javanese civil administration. As Kartini makes clear, Moelijono's career choice is an indication of the undercurrent of critical attitudes towards the colonial regime present in Kartini's family.

My younger brother absolutely does not want to become a priyayi and enter the civil service[9] and if Mevrouw has from time to time recounted anything from my letters to you, you will know that I would not regret this – on the contrary – that I would rejoice in his intentions and plans.

We think it is wonderful that our brother has not set himself as an ideal that which thousands of his compatriots before him and at this time see as most desirable, as the epitome of good fortune: to be a little king, wear shining W. buttons and to have a golden striped sunshade.[10] It is a great joy to us that such pomp and ceremony do not attract him and it is especially satisfying that he has come to this realization at such a young age and completely of his own accord has decided to take another path than that chosen and followed by thousands before him.

I would have preferred to have seen him devote himself to the suffering of humanity and have chosen to study Medicine. Perhaps this is partly out of self-interest. I would very much like to see him become a doctor because in that area there is so much wonderful work to be done and … he would then be able to put into practice so many of our ideas. How much would he not be able to do for the mutual understanding of the European and Native society? He could make his people familiar with European medicine and in the European world generate interest in the simple Native methods whose usefulness has been proven. I talked to my brother about the Doctor-Jawa school but he has no interest in it and we do not want to exert any pressure.

In the paper we have just received we read that the day before yesterday you commenced your journey to East and Central Java. Where should I send this letter? I shall take a chance and send it to Pamekasan, hoping fervently that it will reach you. Because oh, we would all so very much like to have you with us; if it is at all possible would you please take heed of the appeal from us all: 'Come and visit your friends in Jepara.'

We would so very much like to see you and talk with you.

We are so excited by that news in the paper. Oh we are so hoping and praying that the kind, guiding stars will lead you to Jepara!

Tomorrow I will write to Moedertje and Edie.

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9 The term 'priyayi', traditionally applied to the indigenous Javanese ruling class, had begun to carry negative connotations when applied to those who entered the Javanese colonial service.

10 The buttons on the formal uniform of government officials carried the letter 'W', a reference to the Dutch monarch Queen Wilhelmina. Ceremonial umbrellas, traditionally accompanying the nobility were, as Kartini had sarcastically commented earlier, also adopted by European colonial officials.

Just finally this, before I finish: we feel uncomfortable that you call us 'Raden Ajeng'. Would you do us a great, great favour? Just call us by our name, and please leave out the formal 'you' as well.[11]

Please accept hearty regards from my parents and my sisters and with a warm handshake,

With respect and love,
Kartini

Our brother Boesono is very pleased that things appear to be so favourable for us.

To Mijnheer Abendanon

15 January 1903

Highly Esteemed Mijnheer Abendanon

We have just read in the paper that tomorrow you will travel from Kediri to Surabaya; last night I addressed a letter to you to Pameskasan in which, on behalf of my parents and the rest of the family, I requested you, when you come to Semarang, do us the honour of visiting Jepara again and to call in on us.

I am making this request again since I fear that my other letter (which was actually intended to be sent to Batavia) will not reach you – I had no idea that your trip had already commenced when I wrote yesterday. It was only when I was finishing it that I heard about it from Father who brought me the paper which had just arrived.

We hope very much that you will accede to our request. Should however the gods not be favourably disposed and you will not be able to visit us, would you be so kind as to briefly inform us of the date on which you will arrive in Semarang and how long you think you will be there? We will endeavour to meet you there. Will you then also let us know where you will be staying? We would so like to see you and speak with you again, and if you were unable to come here, then we would want, by some means or another, to still meet with you and speak with you.

We would be so sakit ati if you were in our neighbourhood and we had been unable to meet you!

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[11] Abendanon has, it seems, scrupulously maintained the formal address Kartini was entitled to, as Kartini maintained the formal style of Dutch address for Abendanon, which contrasted markedly with the informality of Kartini's (and presumably to Mevrouw Abendanon's) correspondence.

How are you? I sincerely hope that the trip has not taxed your energies too much. I know whose heart is with you day and night and constantly asks itself: 'How is the traveller faring?' It is that of Moedertje who is loyally watching over the sickbed of her child. What is the last news from Edie? Oh, I have such a mountain of questions to ask you. I would like to know so much about him, about his mother, about you, about everyone and everything. I await with great impatience news about the family now in Fort de Kock.

This afternoon I received a letter from Mevrouw van Kol in which she included a message from her husband: 'We should put in a petition to the G.G.' Heer v. Kol believes that our chances are very good. The matter has been raised in the Indies budget estimates, as you know, and the minister has given an affirmative answer. We would also like to have your advice on this. We fervently hope we will be able to do this orally.

My parents and sisters send you their greetings. With respect and fondness I take your hand.

Your Kartini

To Mevrouw van Kol

17 January 1903

Not a drop of rain has fallen in three weeks; it is stiflingly hot here, it has never been so hot, not even in the driest East Monsoon. Father is in despair. The padi seedlings are turning brown in the sawah. Oh poor, poor people! Till now the people of this district have had enough to eat and have not yet encountered the disaster of 'food shortage'. But what has not happened before may eventuate and this dry spell in the midst of the West monsoon spells anything but good news. What will happen if this drought continues? The last couple of mornings it has been windy, as it usually is in May. Does this mean that the change of seasons has already commenced?

It is terrible. We are powerless to do anything about it. It is dreadful to see that everything one has sown and planted turn brown and die and not be able to do anything about it. One cannot make water! And this heat also enervates the body, one feels weak and listless.

What do you think of this complaint by a child of the sun! Oh it's terrible for the people who work in the fields when it is so hot as it is now – and that it should be so in the West Monsoon. Can't you send us some of your cold air here? You can get from us as much warmth as you want. If only we could do that!

* * * *

I am proud by nature. Bitter experiences in my childhood have reigned in this haughtiness and tempered it. I can still remember well a year full of bitterness in my childhood. I was a child of about 10, I had a disagreement with an older brother – the sweetest and dearest one that I was very much attached to. The issue was insignificant but neither of us was prepared to give way, he didn't because he was older than me, and I didn't because I was right. And as a result for an entire year we did not speak to each other, refused to look each other in the face. We both suffered incredibly, we both loved each other utterly and could not do without each other's love. This lesson had also to be repeated with a sister, who was my bosom child – and even more proud than me. Pride against pride even though we loved each other so much. It was hard, it was hell. But that was enough – we had learned our lesson.[12]

To Mijnheer Abendanon

25 January 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

I have been sitting staring at this paper for a long time without getting any further than the introduction: so many emotions are swirling through my head, so many feelings are agitating my soul. During those moments I have been reliving my life of the last few years, beginning with that unforgettable day when two noble souls crossed our path. I was quite correct when I predicted that memories of that divinely happy, wonderful day would be a beacon to us when life took us through valleys of darkness. And many, many times this prophesy has come to pass in the few years which we have known you.

Besides joyous happiness, we have known bitter suffering, despair and doubt. It is as if in that brief period we have lived several lives. The years of our childhood innocence seem to lie so far behind us … The last weeks, days, have again been rich in momentous events for us.

Didi's accident which affected us so deeply, news from Holland, Father's illness, the announcement of your visit, your arrival yesterday, and your departure today … that has been another entire life on its own. Wednesday we experienced a thousand anxieties about Father; your telegram on Thursday came like a ray of sunshine breaking through the clouds. Father recovered;

[12] This paragraph is derived from Bouman (1954), 11–12 and reproduced in Allard (1976), 431.

that in itself was reason for much gratitude, and you came to increase it! We lived as if in a dream after the news of your arrival, counting the hours that still separated us from you. It was then to be, that we would see you again, and what was more – here – in our home!

What a torrent of thoughts flowed through my mind when you stood there before us at the station and you took my hand! I thought of Her, I thought of your dear boy, I thought of your illness in 1901 and there was both sadness and gratitude; there was a bit of everything in my heart but sadness was the dominant feeling! What a lot you and your family and we have experienced in the time that lies between our farewell at the Koningsplein and our meeting again at Pecangaan.[13] Now, while I am writing, the memory of those experiences passes through my mind; I feel as though I am suffocating. No I do not want to give in to it, I will take what you said to me this morning to heart. I do not want to allow myself to be overwhelmed by tragic thoughts, I want to conquer suffering, grief has to serve me.

We are so very, very grateful for your great kindness in visiting us and for being prepared to put up with that tiring journey. And what you discussed with us yesterday at the seaside and this morning in the carriage, oh, how can we ever thank you?

I know of no words that can adequately express our feelings. That can only be felt, never said! We are, oh, so grateful and happy that you have spoken with us. That was the language of a candid and true friend.

How privileged and richly blessed we are to have friends such as the three of you. Last night I spent the entire night thinking about what you had said and the consequences this has had, you know. The two of us[14] talked about it together for a long time yesterday and today, and as soon as Father has regained his strength somewhat, we will talk it over with him. For the present we can begin by bringing Mama up to date in the matter and meanwhile quietly and calmly begin to write the memorandum. When that business is completed, then letters will be sent to Holland. Such a peaceful feeling has now come over us.[15] This is what we had need of – a calm, serious, kind word from someone we knew to be a well placed, knowledgeable and a candid friend.

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13 Despite the copious correspondence, the two had not met since August 1900. Pecangaan was the terminal of the steam tram from Semarang (see map).

14 That is, Kartini and Roekmini.

15 Abendanon's advice that she not go to the Netherlands but apply nevertheless for a government scholarship, appears to have resolved Kartini's immediate difficulties of conflicting loyalties. The letter is also intended to reassure Abendanon – and perhaps herself – of her acceptance of his recommendation. Details of this meeting are conveyed in the following letter to Abendanon's son.

We yearned to speak to you both. From the depth of my heart I thank you for your words, your advice.

What had also made us look forward to H. was to be for a time completely away from that world which had so sorely wounded our souls. That terrible suffering was not to be experienced again. H. would ensure that that possibility would be completely excluded, but in its place it would bring mountains of other miseries.[16]

Thank you for having pointed this out to us!

What will Moedertje think of it? (May I refer to your beloved in this way?)

All yesterday and today I thought of her; indeed there is never a day that I do not think of Her. How much the both of us wished that Moedertje and Didi had been able to sit with us on the beach! It would have been too wonderful!

This morning how we hated it, how much we hated it that you had to go again. I have such a terrible feeling of emptiness now that you are gone. I feel as though another piece of me has been torn away. Oh, and the idea that the both of you and Didi will be leaving Java for good in the not too distant future, filled me with sadness, it hurts me so much. The idea of separation forever, never to see each other again is so painful.

No, no, I do not want to think about it, that is still in the future, and I want to enjoy to the fullest what the present offers us.

It is a dream of ours to be able to see the three of you again, wherever that might be, preferably of course at your house or here with us.

With this I am sending the extracts from our letters which Mevr. van Kol has published. I am doing it now because tomorrow I may forget, each day brings its own demands.

How has the journey proceeded? I sincerely hope that you will not suffer any ill consequences from it. How glad we were when we saw you looking so well again. We are so pleased about this!

And now, once more, thank you very, very much for your visit here and for everything and everything. I had to write to you, before I had done so I had been so sad and now that I have spoken to you I no longer feel that emptiness inside me so much.

My parents and sisters send you their kindest regards and with affection I take your hand,

Kartini

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16 It should be noted that this reference to Kartini's original plans is 'diplomatically' situated in the middle of her letter alongside what was apparently Abendanon's portrayal of the problems she would face in the Netherlands and subsequently, on her return to Java.

To EC Abendanon

27 January 1903

I was thinking about the time before when your Father and Moedertje and I enjoyed the sea, our sea, together! They were treasured moments that one cannot, will never forget! Also on this last occasion the moments we spent sitting on the beach with your father will live on in our memory. It was here that your father discussed our plans with us.

This was so important for us, to have a heart-to-heart discussion with one whom we so greatly respect, love, and know to be an honest friend. And what were the consequences? I couldn't sleep the whole night, I spent the entire night wrestling with your Father's serious, well-meaning words in my head and in my heart! This is what we needed, what we had anticipated with a deep longing. A serious word spoken with love, heart-to-heart, eye to eye.

To our regret, your father already had to leave very early the following morning. We accompanied his Excellency in the carriage for some of the way and resumed the discussion we were having on the beach.

The result is that very soon, with the complete support of our parents, we will be submitting a request to the Governor General to request the Government to provide us with the opportunity, in the interests of the Javanese woman, to complete our education in … Batavia![17]

Aren't you surprised, my dear brother? I don't know what you will think of it. But don't you think we are indecisive? First she wanted with all her heart to go to Holland, moved heaven and earth to get her way and now finally when she could go thanks to the efforts of her friends, she says: 'I'll stay'. What do you say about that turnaround? Well, better to have lost one's way and found it again than to be completely lost perhaps only out of sheer pride not to admit one's mistake.

Do you know when that idea of ours of going to Holland became fixed in our minds? In the days of December 1901 when we were suffering so much. A wild and furious longing to get away, far away, entirely out of this environment that had made us suffer so bitterly. Away, away, away, far away to another environment, to another country, to breathe in another air, lead a different life. And when the wounds inflicted on our souls had healed and we had regained our spiritual and perhaps also our physical strength, to return as reborn to our old society to work there for its reform…

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17 In this letter Kartini provides a convincing rationalization of her acceptance of the new plan suggested by Abendanon. Nevertheless she also makes clear that the change of heart may not have taken place without Abendanon's personal and direct face-to-face intervention.

That hellish suffering must not be experienced again. Holland would ensure that this would never be experienced again. It would ensure that people would forget us, sadly this forgetting would be all too successful. Even that section of the Native population for whom we wanted to work, for whom we had gone to Holland, would forget us. And what would be waiting for us in Holland? Mountains of grief of which we have not the slightest idea. It is this which your Father drew our attention to, what we could expect here in particular from the side of those in whose interests we wanted to work after we had been in Holland.

This is only too true! Oh, poor illusions! You know that it has always been our greatest desire to be educated in Holland for the task that we plan to undertake…

Also Father's most recent severe illness caused us to rethink. His Excellency is so devoted to us … certain circumstances at his sickbed during his most recent illness that remain clearly in my mind demonstrated how much his dear heart was devoted to us. But I ask myself, would we have arrived at this decision if your father had not been here and had spoken to us as His Excellency did? I don't know…

Nevertheless there is no doubt that our Parents have a lot to thank your Father for. And we ourselves are also so grateful to him.

My sister and I discussed and thought over your Father's words together for a long time and the conclusion is that going to Holland will for the time being be placed on the back burner and we now hope to go to Batavia very soon.

But all this is from a personal perspective. In the foreground we must place the practical advantages that going to Batavia will have for our project. We will be able to begin straight away, while if we went to Holland we would have to wait such a long time. I always have to think of your Father's words: 'Why not do straight away what could be done now. It will then be achieved, while the other would still lie in the future.'[18] Your father spoke of a wounded person calling for help: someone comes along but tells him: 'No, friend, I don't want to help you now, I will first learn how wounds need to be treated.' The person goes away, studies and when he is finally able to treat wounds correctly the wounded person who had asked for help would have died long ago.

Then your father talked about a pearl lying deep in the sea. You know it is lying there but not precisely where. You go into the sea to get it. The water comes up to the height of your lips. Someone comes along and says to you: 'Friend, don't do this, don't go any further, the water is already up to your lips.

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[18] Becoming a teacher had been Abendanon's initial suggestion in 1900 although then he had not envisaged formal teacher training or Kartini establishing her own school.

If you drown you will still not have your pearl. Go back, get into a prauw, spear and fish for your pearl.'

Your Father said that if we want, we could begin a school immediately without having completed any of the exams. There is nothing in the regulations that one needs to have undertaken any exams to teach at a Native school for girls. We could engage a European lady teacher – that would not be a problem. But do you think it would be acceptable to open a school without first being trained? It is true that Our School (that sounds so strange, and even rather pedantic) would be more focused on providing a moral education rather than being instructional. For this reason we want to establish a private school, not a Government school, because otherwise we would have to submit to specific regulations and we want to establish our school entirely according to our idea, educate the children not in a scholastic manner, but in the way that a mother raises her children.

It must not remind one of a school in any way but of a large family whose members love each other, and learn from each other and the mother is so not just in name but in actual fact – the physical and spiritual educator of her child.

We have thought about your father's idea before, but in this way: if we could not study and had to stay at home, we could invite the daughters of regents to stay with us in our home, as many as the kabupaten could accommodate, let them go to school here and take on their moral education at home ourselves. Train their little hearts through play, form their characters and when our little children are going to school, take in other children from native officials in the neighbourhood and teach them handicraft etc. while we, unnoticed, go to work on their little hearts to develop the spirit that we want to develop.

But if we could open a school then we would prefer to study first, don't you think that would be better, brother? That school would be established either in Magelang or Salatiga.[19] Your father discussed this with our family and there is no problem with that at all – there is with going to Holland. That's wonderful isn't it, brother?

Our Grandfather had organized a school in his day along the lines I described above. Grandfather had a tutor come out for his children and the Pangerans from Solo and a regent from central Java sent their sons as well to be educated. So you see, there is nothing new under the sun. Our idea, supposedly brand new is an old idea derived from that of my Grandfather. Our

[19] Both towns in Central Java had significant European populations which would have presented a healthy demand for a Western oriented Javanese staff. The school Kartini imagines here is quite different from the later 'Kartini school'.

ideal, our spirit has been inherited. He – Grandfather – was the pioneer: we are merely continuing his work. They were fine people, both Grandfather and Grandmother.

But how I am chatting on about people from other, perhaps better times who are complete strangers for you. Well, I just wanted you to know the relationship that exists between the so-called 'new' and 'old', and that our ideas are definitely not new.

Your Father gave us an idea of how the request should be drawn up. It should only be a few lines but it should be accompanied by a memorandum in which our plans and ideas must be set out in detail and carefully explained and it must be written from the heart, not thinking that it is directed to the Governor General but simply an expression of what is in our hearts.[20]

Your father is prepared to read the memorandum first if we want him to but he thinks that won't be necessary. We should simply write what is in our hearts.

To EC Abendanon

31 January 1903

We have to finish this letter today to catch tomorrow's mail via which this will go; doesn't time fly? It is already a week ago that your dear father was here.

Now just a bit about business, is that all right? I passed the order for the small table and the bookcase on to the woodcraftsman and he is already at work on it. But you will need to have a little patience. He has a lot to do for Oost en West. We are having your table made as an octagonal and according to the batik pattern of a kain of mine. It's pure Javanese though! It and the bookcase I am having made are of sono wood (with a dark grain); it is the most beautiful wood we could get here. The bookcase will consist of two shelves, not too big as you requested. The exact measurements I have forgotten for the moment.

Actually I have also had two small tables made of different designs – I am attaching a sketch of them with this. They are both standing on three carved legs separated below by a smaller tray.

The screen for the Governor General that we sent off recently is something to kneel in front of. Your Father saw it when he was here before it left and was

[20] This memorandum was not written till April.

full of praise about it. Now we are having two fireguards made, consisting of three panels carved in shell à jour in the form of a garuda (legendary native bird) with movable wings.

New ideas constantly come to mind and it is wonderful that Oost en West enables us to put them into effect. Sometimes these ideas come to us when we are already in our cots: quickly crawl out of bed, put on the light (such a strange expression) and write it down, we forget it the following morning and that would be a pity.

Will you tell your Mother[21] that we have already discussed with our parents about going to Batavia and to that school in Meester Cornelis or Salemba. They have no problems with that. That's wonderful isn't it, brother?

They are delighted that we are staying in Java. 'It would be terrible if you went,' Father said, 'I want to always be able to see you.' Poor dear! But now it is all right. They are so grateful to your father. We had to promise Mama that we would always stay together and work together. Could it be any better than that? That is exactly what we want too.

In the end it was good that we initially insisted we wanted absolutely to go to Holland. Now they are happy with Batavia; had we only wanted Batavia there would now have been objections. After giving up Holland, all objections have fallen away. Now our petition will be sent quite soon with a memorandum and father's declaration that he has no objection to our plans. But you know what we are not at all looking forward to? It is to have to discuss our plans with the authorities whose intermediary is required for our request to reach the G.G. This is terrible for us. Would you not think so too, if you had to discuss your most intimate thoughts, the things most dear to your heart, with people who you knew beforehand would not only not give you a sympathetic reception but who would prefer to see you leave than arrive. But this will be necessary, won't it. Soon we will call in to the Ass[istant] Res[ident of Jepara] to discuss the matter, so that will be at least one done. Then we have to go and see the Resident [of Semarang]. Your father was going to speak with him in general terms about it so that he would not oppose the request outright. Perhaps now he will approve of it, now that our plan is to stay in the Indies. In the past though he was of the opinion that girls should marry, and any alternative to this was too stupid to contemplate. Can you understand our reluctance now? Nevertheless we will approach him in good spirits after we have seen the others. Brrrr. It will be just a foretaste of what is to come.

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21 This and the preceding letter sent to EC Abendanon were evidently intended also to inform Rosa who may still have been with her injured son in Sumatra. Alternatively it may be that Kartini was avoiding writing to Rosa directly on this painful subject.

How happy Annie Glaser also will be with the news! Now we will be together again. A nice idea. She may then join us in Batavia. That was her plan before. Then we would be together again and like old comrades share the sweet and the sour. We received a letter from her yesterday and imagine – containing a list of questions to answer asked by a gentleman who is very interested in the issue of the day: the education of the Javanese people, and would very much like our ideas on the matter. Mr Slingenberg is attached to the Ministry of Colonies and has been sent here by the Government to draw up a new criminal law. Annie says that he seriously wants to do his best to see what he can do for us. He cannot come to Jepara in person any more because he has to leave mid-February. That is why the questions needed to be answered quickly and in detail!!![22]

The questions he sent us are very important, and exactly those that we are very passionate about. But for that reason we can't just quickly answer them. Just to give you an idea: Question One asks: 'What means would be suitable to raise the population of Java to a higher level of development and prosperity?' It is a question which grey-haired, learned gentlemen have studied … and this I should answer just like that in detail?

Question 2. 'In what ways should education be improved and extended?' This is hardly a question that can be answered in a few words! At least 5 or so pages would be required. Question 5 on the other hand could be answered with one word: 'Is it a fact that the significance of the woman in the development of the Javanese is paid too little attention by the authorities?'

The person asking these questions is undoubtedly one of the new ideas people.[23]

And the last question is simply delightful to answer: 'In what ways can a beginning be best made to bring a higher level of education and development to the Javanese woman of both the lower and upper classes and will this come into conflict with the traditions and customs of the country?' They are all wonderful questions. We will write to you much more about them – is that alright?

They inspire thoughts and feelings that we would not have had without the questions. We wrote them down last night and will work them out in greater detail. It is strange though how things work out in this world. The one thing

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22 Kartini's reply to these questions constitutes her lengthy memorandum on the importance of education written in January 1903 'Geef de Javaan Opvoeding!' (Give the Javanese Education).

23 The phrasing indicates Kartini's awareness of the gradual broadening of the new reformist discourse in the colony and in the Dutch parliament.

draws out the other and in the end everything hangs together. We have ideas that a Christian cabinet would not be adverse to if they heard them.[24] What would you say to the idea of a mission that did not aim at Christianization, that avoided all mention of religion but did what it did only out of pure love of the people of Java? Why could there not be more places in Java with institutions such as the one at Mojowarno without them coming under the auspices of a religious organization? In that way they would not incite the Muslim population against them. The Muslim more or less despises a former fellow religionist who has given up his religion to take on another. In the eyes of a Muslim this is the greatest sin that one could commit. And the Muslim who has now become a Christian, on his part, looks down upon his former co-religionist. Now that he has the same religion as a blanda he believes he is on the same level. I don't need to enlarge upon the consequences that flow from this.

If one absolutely wants to teach the Javanese a religion, well, then teach him to know the one and only God, the father of Love, the father of all mankind, of Christians, as well as of Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, etc. Teach them the true religion: that is, the personal one, and one can follow that religion as Christian as well as Muslim etc. Our idea is that the Netherlands should send refined, educated people of moral standing who out of pure love for mankind wish to settle in the midst of the Javanese people, to live and love with them, to instruct them, cure them, help them wherever help is needed.[25]

Leave the people to their simple ways, don't teach them any new things and only intervene gently where their morality is directly opposed to the greatest principle of all: Love. Later this work could be undertaken by their own people. At the moment there are none available. In brief: missionary work without the baptism.[26]

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24 The new cabinet was led by reformist Protestant minister, Rev. Abraham Kuyper, after the victory of the protestant Christian party, the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij. It was voted into government in the Netherlands' first election based on a universal male franchise. A major plank in its manifesto was concern for 'the declining welfare in Java'. Use of the term 'Christian' in this context suggests Kartini's awareness of the friction between the ideology of the reform-minded Christian political party and that more radical demands of van Kol's Social Democratic Workers' Party and of feminist groups in the pursuit of colonial reform.

25 This sentiment was more or less in line with that of Abendanon's policy as Director of Education. His term (1900–1905) saw a significant expansion of government subsidies to Native private schools, the majority of which were mission schools.

26 This 'maxim' was also similar to that held by Adriani although he was associated with the mission in central Sulawesi. More directly, Kartini succinctly defines here the broad aims of 'ethical' reformers.

Would that be possible? It would be difficult perhaps to find suitable candidates for this work. But I come back to this idea all the time: first a moral basis must be formed and this has to be kept in mind in any form of education.[27]

How can one introduce this moral basis to adults and young adults? I think through appropriate reading matter. One should publish reading material that should include leisure reading (so that they would be eagerly read) but always with an educational aim. It is the same principle that we want to apply to our little children – learning and educating while playing. Why shouldn't this also be applied to adults?[28]

In Batavia we hope to have a lot of contact with the future Doctor Jawa to discuss these ideas with them and to see if we can't convince a few to support them.[29] They could be the ones to carry out missionary work without baptism.

My youngest sister has recently passed the lower civil service examination. She is the first Javanese woman who has sat for that exam.[30] That's nice isn't it!

To Mijnheer Abendanon

1 February 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

Shortly after your departure from here I spoke to Mama about our changed plans, and to my great pleasure I noticed that Father had preceded me in this

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27 The interest in moral education in contrast to a 'mental' education was highlighted by the writing of educational reformers such as Fröbel and Herbart, popularized at the turn of the century in the Netherlands by Maria Montessori and Jan Ligthart, and Christian educationalists such as Nellie van Kol.

28 The concept was developed several years later and came to be known as the Commissie voor Volkslectuur later known as Balai Pustaka.

29 The STOVIA or Doctor-Jawa school in Batavia provided the highest level of Western education then available to Javanese and was responsible for producing the first generation of male nationalists who founded the first nationalist organization, Budi Utomo, in 1908. In an extract of a letter to Mrs Ovink-Soer, included by her in an article on Kartini in 1925 in the socialist paper *Vrije Arbeid*, Kartini implies that she had established contact with this new generation of Western-educated young Javanese men: 'We have convinced so many, the younger generation feels exactly as we do. Jong Java wants to form an association and we will naturally join with them.' This is the only such reference, although in 1908 her sisters did join Budi Utomo. But see also Kartini's letter to Adriani, 5 July 1903.

30 Although not the youngest, this must refer to Kartinah (b. 1883) not Soematri (b. 1888). She appears to have been the first Indonesian woman to have completed the examination then mandatory for men wishing to join the native branch of the colonial civil service. This also confirms that her sisters(s) had completed elementary school.

and had already informed Ma about it. Soon thereafter I had a long discussion with Father and yesterday again with Mama.

It appeared that my Parents had already discussed it at length with each other and with the brothers, in particular with Boesono. When I told him myself he said very little (he is also one who says little, but consequently thinks and notices more) – but afterwards I noticed from what he let slip that he was a little disappointed that we were not going to H. I am pleased about this because it proves that all the idealism in him has not died, that he still dreams and idealizes and longs for … the unreachable![31]

But now about the Parents themselves: their pleasure in the fact that we were staying was moving. We are extremely grateful to you for this. Considered in retrospect it was a good idea that at first we had absolutely wanted to go to H. – now the parents are happy with Batavia and have not the slightest objections about our further plans, only Mama insisted that we would always stay together and work together. Could it be any better? That is exactly what we want.

And as concerns the member of the family under whose protective care we will be working in the future, we requested Mama to find someone for us. We ourselves have someone in mind: the widow of a Regent, and in fact she is from Magelang and has family and friends there. It is the mother of my brother-in-law Tjokrohadisosro.[32] We however do not yet know whether this lady will entertain the idea. Fortuitously my oldest sister and her husband will be coming here shortly and we will then try to win them to our cause. There is a good chance that my brother-in-law will support our request – he is one of the younger generation, an honest boy, a fine spouse and father, we can agree on a number of things. Ma thinks it is excellent that we want to discuss the matter with him. Still, it is advisable not to build up one's hopes, we have so often noticed that while one may not be personally against something, even for it … there is always the family! But my brother-in-law has a lot of influence over his mother; we will hope that he is not against the idea.

Otherwise it would be perfect – if it succeeded, her previous position in society and the fact she is known in and around Magelang cannot but be an advantage. And then, she still has several daughters at home who have

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31 By implication Kartini is perhaps suggesting she also maintains this dream. Together with what is revealed about her two other brothers, Kartono and Moelijono, it is apparent that her siblings all share negative (though not revolutionary) attitudes towards the colonial regime, at least in its unreformed state, while aspiring to take advantage of new opportunities being created by recent reforms.

32 This is the husband of Soelastri, Kartini's older sister.

attended the Convent school, they could also help us. These girls have wanted to come and stay with us to learn from us.

Father also thinks the idea is excellent and agrees that we should soon speak to the Assistant Resident about it. I do not yet know how we will inform the Resident, by speaking to him in person or informing him by letter. But in any case the memorandum has to be written first. Can I ask your advice on this? Should we refer to the marriage question in this, for instance in the way this was done in the letter to Mevr. van Kol? To give it some force this would certainly be a good idea but the piece will first pass through many hands before it gets to the G.G. and no doubt it will leak out; just because it is so unusual it will be talked about and what would happen if my compatriots get to hear of it. Should you think it is necessary that this question is raised, then could we do it this way: attached to the petition will be a memorandum in which the matter of polygamy is not discussed; at the same time another one goes to you in which, without reservation, I express my feelings, totally privately which you will then also privately bring to the attention of the officials whom it may concern.

Would you find this idea too silly? You see what a cuckoo I am…

A memorandum has already been presented to the Ministry of Colonies in which the question has been discussed in detail, more comprehensively even than in the letter to Mevr. van Kol – Heer van Overveldt is the author of this and he presented it before the Indies budget for this year had been discussed in the second chamber. Therefore, officially the Government in H. is already aware of this matter, but now for the government in the Indies. Would you be so kind as to give me your opinion on this with a single word. In a postcard with just one word – 'yes' or 'no': 'yes' would mean that I should broach the marriage question in the memorandum to the G.G., 'no' would mean that I did not need to – and 'good' would mean that you considered it a good idea to accompany the petition with a memorandum in which the matter is not raised, and to send you a private memorandum in which I discuss that question without restraint. Or do you think that I could send this directly to the G.G. without fear. It would be a problem if this became a matter for gossip both here and elsewhere.

Now I have finished business matters, but I have to thank you once again for your friendly advice. How much good that discussion has done me. Why should I not admit to you that we had not yet considered the question from that angle: that is, that going to H. would endanger the very thing at issue. Our 'friends' would be only too pleased to spread the word that we had totally become 'blandas' if we had gone to H., and many parents would have feared

entrusting us with their children. Thank God that you opened our eyes to this in time! Thank you so much! [33]

How are you? I sincerely hope that the tiring trip has not had any bad effects on your health. How is the news from Moedertje and Edie, our brother? We recently received a card from her. Thank God that Edie has recovered and regained his spirits. At the time he was photographing. Yesterday I wrote him a long letter and told him everything. Father has recovered and gathers strength daily, is walking and undertakes journeys again.

The heartiest regards from all of us here and a firm hand from your
Kartini

To Mijnheer Abendanon

4 February 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

Tomorrow the table intended as the present for the silver wedding anniversary will be on its way to Batavia by train. I am sending it unfranked as I do not know how much the postage will be from Semarang to B. and to have to make enquiries would simply delay matters. I bought 9 plangis from the money I had left over; it was such a good opportunity to buy a nice collection of Jepara plangi work that I could not resist the desire to get them for Moedertje for her collection of Native artefacts. I hope Moedertje will like them. For you I bought 24 'kacips', areca nut scissors, which could serve as cigar cutters. I packed them up quickly because the children liked them so much they each wanted one.

I discussed with the goldsmith the possibility of going to Solo to learn how to work with tortoiseshell. The man was immediately interested when I suggested it to him. He can already make combs for which he already has the bekakas; but he still cannot manage the polishing process and that he could learn in Solo. Ivory is worked there, as well as mother-of-pearl, and he could also learn to do this, which he would like to do.

The costs for making the tortoiseshell sirih boxes are:

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[33] This provides further indication of the widespread cultural resistance to the impact of colonialism, expressed in particular with regard to the corruption of Javanese traditions concerning women. In earlier letters Kartini had scoffed at accusations she was aiming to catch a European husband or become like a European but now appears to accept this as a major issue.

Tortoiseshell	*f*15
preparation of it	*f*5
making of the silver frame	*f*18
	*f*38

Will you then send the silver from Batavia – 10 dollars for 1 box. And when you send them, would you be so kind as to add an extra 10 for Mama. In that case, would you please take from the money that you will be sending for the boxes, whatever the 10 dollars for Ma cost, and we will add that amount here. They can also make rather pretty boxes here in the shape of fruit, for example, mangosteens. It is genuine Native and looks well on the dressing table. The cost of making a pair is *f*4 or *f*5 and requires 4 silver dollars. Should we have some made for you?

How are you? And what news is there from Sawah Lunto? I sincerely hope that mother and son are well and also that everything is fine with you at home. We are planning to write to the Resident about the petition; if we could, we would prefer to speak to His Excel.

Oh, I cannot tell you how much we dread to have to go to that other one to talk about our plans.[34] Perhaps that will be another reason for teasing my poor father. It is painful to see our dear Father being made fun of so, our poor dear suffers noticeably by it. God give us all the strength to endure everything, oh, and may things improve soon!

This morning while on a short trip we were witness to a moving scene of naïve peasant belief. It was out in the fields, man and animal were united in a prayer to the Almighty to refresh the thirsty earth with heavenly water. At the front were the priests and the santri, behind them the priestesses in white robes and on either side hundreds of men, women and children. Sheep, goats, horses, buffalo stood tied to stakes. A priest led the service, stood at the head of the assembly and prayed with a loud voice. The crowd joined in with 'amin', 'amin', which mingled with the bleating of the sheep. It is called 'sembayang istica'.[35]

Such a touching, naïve belief and faith that our childlike people have. But I am keeping you with my chatter and I know your moments are precious.

From my parents and sisters the kindest regards with respect and affection

Your Kartini

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34 In the following letter it is clear that the 'other one' is the Assistant Resident of Jepara, Gonggrijp.

35 'Sembayang istica', a blessing. In the following letter she refers to it as 'salat istica'.

To Mijnheer Abendanon[36]

17 February 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon,

Your letter with *f*50 enclosed arrived safely yesterday and today I received the 24 dollars.[37] For this my sincere thanks. I immediately got to work and ordered the goldsmith to make the silver fruits. I have just come from discussing this with him.

The tortoise has not yet arrived from Karimun: there is nothing we can do about it. For the last 2 weeks the sea has been so wild, the prauws do not dare go out.[38] On the night of the 'salat istica' rain started falling and since then it has been raining night and day. There have been several big storms and Boesono's district has been underwater since before last Sunday. When we went to see him this Sunday we sailed on the pasar. The Welahan[39] has now been underwater for 10 days. My brother has built a bridge in his house. The children had such fun. Water and mud everywhere, even in the pendopo.

The prayer for rain lasted for 3 days and 3 nights! You can imagine how excited and grateful the people are that since then it has rained till it poured! The prayer has helped! And do you know what people are saying? – it is because we attended the service! They cannot be dissuaded that we had nothing to do with it.

Before this, a 'sembayang istica' had also been held in other places but nowhere else did a single drop of rain fall and, as it happened, we had not been in attendance at any of these other ceremonies. This had led our naïve childlike people to draw the conclusion that we had added power to this last prayer appeal; that was why it was immediately answered.

Really, such a childlike trusting belief is touching.

It had also been Father's idea to have photographs taken of the ceremony; I would then provide an accompanying description. An acquaintance from here who photographs quite well promised to come over soon, Father will then provide a slametan and call up the people again to hold a prayer meeting. I so often wished that I had a camera and was able to take snapshots when we have

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36 As Rosa is in Sumatra attending her injured stepson, Jacques Abendanon is attending to the correspondence usually undertaken by his wife. This is therefore an uncharacteristically informal letter to this high colonial official in which she also makes fun of fellow officials Resident Sijthoff and Assistant Resident Gonggrijp.

37 Silver Spanish 'dollars' were melted down to provide silver for ornamentation.

38 Karimun is an island off the coast of Jepara.

39 In January Kartini wrote of the continuing drought. The Welahan is an area lying between Jepara and Semarang.

seen some unique customs of our people that no European is able to witness. So many things we would like to record in word and picture which would be able to give the European a clearer impression of us Javanese. Someone has promised me to photograph the complete growth cycle of the padi, the karbouw and the boca angons included. I would then provide the accompanying description as I, being a child of the people, saw and understood these things. Yesterday I met that person but he cannot yet carry out his promise because of the mud in the sawahs; his equipment would sink.[40]

We think it is wonderful that you so admire everything we have sent to you. Don't you agree that the small table is a delight? Moedertje must be proud of it, even though it is no longer hers!

How are things with her and Didi? We are so looking forward to getting some news from them both. We hope everything will go <u>well</u> with those dear people. We discuss them so often and often think about him. Did the photograph of the table also come out well? Should it not have an accompanying description? You know that I am always happy to do something for you, that it would be a great <u>joy</u> for me to be able to do something for you both.

I am also always at the service of Oost en West. I am thereby doing no one but myself a favour. It is for <u>our people</u> with whom I feel <u>one</u>. Everything I do for my people I do for myself. So please command me as you wish, give me as much to do as you like, never fear that it might be too much for me, I want to do everything for our people. Only I ask for your indulgence when something or other is not completed quickly enough for you. We are only at the very beginning of the resurgence of our beautiful culture, and it is only natural, therefore, that everything cannot immediately be exactly as it ought.

We will gladly have the order for the kacips carried out as soon as we receive it. <u>That</u> is the <u>intention</u>! I think *f*30 and at the most *f*40 will be sufficient for the journey to Solo by the goldsmith and his accommodation there.

I received a nice letter from Dr Pijzel, one of the directors of *Eigen Haard,* as well as several copies of the piece about woodcarving. The photos are beautifully reproduced, don't you think so? I received several beautifully reproduced on fine paper.

Do you know what I think is wonderful? That Moedertje introduced me on the very first occasion that I wrote publicly under my own name. But we like

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[40] Kartini makes regular references to modern technology. This reference to photography relates to her on-going interest to act as a 'cultural translator', inspired by the growing academic and popular ethnographic interest but no less by a concern to educate the Dutch public as an expression of a proto-nationalist Javanese cultural identity.

much less the fact that once again we are being used as publicity. It seems that that now has to be part of it.[41]

It was wonderful to hear that in the Minahassa there is also a Native girl who has 'crazy ideas' like us![42] So you see, we are not the only mad ones! And should the nobility not want us here, and the people also turn against us, then we can flee to that faraway soul sister to find work for head, heart and hand in some forgotten place far from this power struggle. In the big, big world there must be a place somewhere where people can abide us!

Oh, and what do you say to this: even before we had the chance to write to Mijnheer Sijthoff we received a very hearty letter from him last week in which he wrote how much he regretted our stubbornness, only to declare a few lines further on that this had commanded his respect, and, that, as a result, he promised us his support should we need it – we had only to call on him. This is what we wanted, now we have this promise in black and white, and this is your work.[43] How will we ever be able to thank you enough for everything and everything? We will never be able to repay you your kindness, dear, noble people, we can but love you both very, very much for the rest of our lives!

We have already spoken to the other person here about our plan.[44] If only you had been able to be present at that discussion. Good heavens, how friendly that was. Hardly had a few words been exchanged when we were given a sermon like no minister could have been able to preach it. Native culture was praised to the heavens while that of Europeans was criticized. He considered himself crude, while every Javanese from the desa was refined, his superior in culture! He gave the impression of having an incredible wealth of knowledge. We had resolved not to let ourselves become angry, and we believed we were extremely polite and refined at the time: we let him have his say (or rather allowed him to expend his rage). When that had occurred we asked calmly

41 This was Kartini's article 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje'. In these paragraphs Kartini is commenting on the editor's introduction to her piece which is reproduced in this volume on pp. 739–41 below.

42 This appears to be a reference to Eti Wawu Runtu who later wrote to Roekmini (see Coté 2008).

43 Relations between expanding central bureaucracies and regional administrations were changing and, as Director of Education, Abendanon may have 'advised' the regional resident on this issue which concerned his jurisdiction when he visited the resident in Semarang as part of his tour.

44 The reference is to Assistant Resident Gonggrijp, an advocate of colonial reform and known as a fierce critic of the colonial bureaucracy. His 'rage' typified the position of some reformists inspired by an orientalist fascination with Java and, conversely, critical of unreformed colonial attitudes. By contrast, Abendanon was a more 'realistic' reformer. He was presumably also placated by Kartini's decision not to go to the Netherlands where she might become 'Europeanized'.

whether he was aware of what we wanted to do? And that he could not answer. Then we told him briefly and precisely some of the details and … then he came to see reason, it was not so bad after all!

In the meantime it had become very late, we were obliged to go but we were asked to return soon. We will do so as soon as we have returned from Semarang. We are going to Semarang tomorrow to speak to the Resident and on our return the petition will be sent. We are not concerned about it, you will take care of it. We are very grateful!

My oldest sister has been here, she left again yesterday, although not to return to Kendal but to go to Kudus to her mother-in-law to plead our cause with her.[45]

All these things which we have experienced in recent times make us ponder, make us philosophical! Here is someone going to plead our cause for us who has for so long been implacably opposed to it. We had not wracked our brains to develop an argument to soften her heart. We had simply spoken heart-to-heart and it felt so strange when our sister with moist eyes and a noticeable trembling in her voice said: 'Go, fulfil your plans, realize your dreams, I will pray to God that He will bless you!'

And that is, after all, not a curse, it is a blessing!

We had asked her: 'Will you not be concerned when others jeer at us and condemn us?' And she had answered: 'Even those who shout loudest will one day be silent!' Our sister thinks that her mother will agree and also that her husband will approve.

And as to how things are here at home? In earlier times we would never have been allowed to discuss it with anyone and now they themselves talk about it. Recently we were talking with a stranger about all kinds of things and how my heart swelled with happiness and delight when I often found myself standing next to Father. I am his child in spirit as well, sang my heart! Father had requested the stranger to come here often, for us to exchange ideas and that would be good for us! Oh, may it be that our dream will be realized, that our journey may begin with their total blessing!

On the Sunday that you were with the Resident, my sister Soelastrie had arrived in Semarang. She had known from us that you would be there and she had very much wanted to meet the Friend of her sisters. When she heard where you were staying, she changed her mind.

And now, the heartiest greetings from everyone and a warm hand from your

Kartini

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[45] The aim was to secure this lady's support for Kartini's plan to open a school in Magelang.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

4 March 1903

Dearest Moedertje,

How wonderful, Didi is coming! Didi is coming to Batavia. We are so happy about this, for you and for him. We can so easily imagine how overjoyed you are, especially because we so totally share in it! We wish you the greatest happiness, dear Moedertje! Didi is already with you now, isn't he? Shake him warmly by the hand on our behalf, the sisters wish him welcome to Java, the beloved land of our birth! Tell him that we gladly share in his happiness and in his suffering.

And now, many thanks for both your letters and the beautiful photograph with which you made us very happy. It is very beautiful, but the snapshot by Didi we think is better. It is indeed a fine object, that table. Have you seen its original yet?

You understand that, had there not been a serious reason, I would have written to you immediately when we received your first letter that arrived a week or so ago. I was so very happy that you were home again. I regret the circumstances that prevented me from telling you how happy I was. I have been very ill. For days on end people here have been very anxious about me and I myself suffered the most excruciating pain that I would not wish even on my worst enemy (if I had one!).

I had a severe rheumatic headache, from time to time I became stiff with pain. Thank goodness that wretchedness is now behind us. Oh, and what an insignificant cure freed me from that excruciating pain! We wrote it up for our collection of stories that will later be of benefit to our children. Yesterday I commenced work again I am progressing well, and today for the first time I went out riding. Father's thankfulness was quite touching. I naturally sat next to him and father constantly held me close, as though fearing he would lose me. Those were treasured moments, priceless memories, for me a talisman for the future. Oh, we have all suffered so much, physically and spiritually.

I cannot yet write very much, you will understand, and I also have a lot to do. How I regret that because of my illness the petition and memorandum have had to be put aside. At the moment I have no interest in writing them.

Goodnight dearest. Greet Mijnheer and Didi for us and receive a warm kiss from your own

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

9 March 1903

Dearest Moedertje,

Just a few words of information about something that will arrive a day before you receive this. Several months ago you asked me to have a number of items of woodcarving made. I did so; the other day the woodcarver brought me several of them. I chose the best for you and sent the rest to Oost en West. They are: 1 jewelry box with wayang and 1 hombre box, both without hinges or lock because they are not made nicely here and it is done better in Batavia. Should you not want them then perhaps Didi might, he has just written me about this, otherwise just pass them on to O. en W., they will always accept it.

I also sent you 2 dringin assuming that you would also like examples of this craft for your collection of artefacts from the Indies. If you do not want them then also pass these on to O. en W. I specifically sent you these 2, the one with the check design because that was something new, the very latest, and as yet the only one in existence, and the other because it is so beautiful and is the work of Javanese women. Traditionally, making dringin has been exclusively the work of Malay women. Now Javanese women have learned to do this work as well. What I sent you is one of the first made by them.

Now, with regard to financial matters:

1 hombre box	*f*16
1 jewelry box	*f*16
1 checked dringin	*f*11
1 dringin of double width	*f*25
transport	*f*0.95
	*f*68.95

Moedertje, you are not very angry with me, are you, that I have bought so much for you? Fortunately there is a way to get this purchase off your hands if it does not suit you, namely, Oost en West, for whom it had in any event been originally intended. And forgive me if perhaps now I am passing them on to them through you. You are also an O. en W. member aren't you?

And I have something else for you that was brought to me today by the woodcarver but you must take this, because oh, it is so beautiful, something

new and an idea thought up by your little girls. You must accept it, you must have the first one (how I command here like a real princess, and of course I am not one!) There are 2 and I am sending you both, one is for Didi because, oh Moeke, I cannot send those beautiful first productions to Oost en West. They are too dear to me, and then it hurts me to sell them publicly, not knowing in whose hands they will fall.

Because I interest myself so much in our artists, am completely involved in their work, I feel as though I am something of a spiritual mother to these creations which is why it pains me when such extremely beautiful things become the possession of indifferent people who are unable to appreciate them or at least do so insufficiently. That is why I would wish that everything made which is beautiful comes into your possession because I know you would be a caring owner, Mother, I might almost have said, for them. But that is impossible, yet where it is at all possible, then you will, yes Moeke? You will do that for me? Of all the beautiful small objects made and which we have helped design, can I buy the first one for you? They are only small objects, not expensive, they would cost less than *f*10.

Where it involves larger objects then of course I shall first discuss it with you. But will you give me the authority to buy up small, beautiful objects for you when I come across them? This of course only applies to Native craftwork. The wood carving that I have here for you and Didi I had intended for keeping handkerchiefs or ties in, but of course you could use them for other things. They are boxes in the shape of a half moon, like albums, and so have a curved spine, a carved lid with a bow-shaped front representing leaves, really very pretty.

I immediately ordered another 24 of them, confident as I am of my feeling that they will be very popular in Batavia. You will then be the first, and for a while the only, owner of such a lovely object. I will send them together with other delightful objects that your husband ordered. I hope that His Excellency has forgotten to tell you what they are, then it will be a surprise for you.

We received news that the tortoise has been obtained so it will be here in a few days and then the goldsmith will take it to Solo! How wonderful, now there are already 3 branches of the cultural arts coming back to life in the place of my birth and it is our plan to uncover still others and to breathe life into them.

They now know, realize, that it is our aim to assist them in their own efforts to prosper, they realize their benefit and appreciate our work by working with us with vigour and enthusiasm.

Everything we did for them would be worthless if they did not understand that our intentions towards them were good and had as their aim, their progress. I am grateful that they understand this, otherwise our work would be useless. It is wonderful to see how these areas of activity are coming alive. The women dringin workers are beginning to work on a larger scale and even in the kampong outside the Malay district, Natives are involved in it. So it is going well. The goldsmith has taken on more assistants and pupils. And there are young men who have offered themselves for training in the woodcarving craft.[46]

One thing I have particularly applauded with great joy. Amongst these pupils there is a young man from the kota, in other words not from Blakang Gudung, the woodcarving village. Other pupils we ourselves have searched out but that one from the kota came forward himself! That is the real thing! And such a wonderfully pleasing sign. I am very grateful for it!

The younger sisters will continue this work when we are no longer here, we will offer them our guidance from a distance as long as they may still need direction. We are gradually separating ourselves from them in order to teach them to be independent. Little Soematri is taking a firm grip on herself but that soft, dear child, Kartinah, is in despair. She carries out everything she has to do neatly and precisely but someone else has to tell her what to do, has to think them out for her.

She is such a good child, correct, precise and orderly in everything. Perhaps she will quickly learn to be independent when she no longer has us to take on totally the responsibility of the consequences of her actions.[47] We leave her as much as possible to make up her own mind. It really is something, is it not Moeke, this raising of children?

And now I must give you a reprimand, cheeky eh? Do you know that you never gave me an answer to my question as to whether you wanted the étagère? You asked me for a drawing, I sent it to you and I received it back from you without a single word about it. I could only draw the conclusion that you were not interested in the étagère and that you had decided not to go ahead with the order. And then you write: 'Is the étagère which you were having made for me, ready yet?' I received such a shock. I thought I had been careless, I checked

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46 Seen in historical context, it can be claimed that Kartini played an important role in what became the first overt signs of the modern Javanese national cultural revival, albeit in large part in response to a European 'ethnographic' interest, which came to a flowering the following decade.

47 It was indeed Kartinah, the last of the sisters to marry, who continued to manage the woodcraft business (see Coté 2008).

everything and quickly came to the conclusion to my great relief that my only oversight had been that I had not continued asking you for information until you had provided it.

Forgive me dearest, dear Moeke? I know that you are always very busy and have so many things to think about so my duty was to remind you that you still needed to give me an answer and continue to remind you until you finally gave me an answer. Forgive me! I will now have the étagère made. From your question I gather that you are leaving the measurements to me. The stand and the small table are in the process of being made.

And now, oh how pleased we are and how happy with the prospect of seeing Didi, that dear boy, our brother, in our midst very soon! I danced with joy when I read that letter of his. Finally a dear, dear wish of ours will be fulfilled at last – but then all of a sudden I was struck still, became serious and worried. I thought of the cruel, bitter circumstances that had preceded this happy announcement! Had Edie not had that terrible accident, that wish would have remained a wish for a long time to come, if not forever! However, let us surrender ourselves to the laws of nature. Nature will not have it otherwise, darkness precedes light. When night has been struggled through let us then take joy in the day to which it gives birth and be grateful that light has evolved from the darkness!

We want to remind you of a promise. Do you remember what you told us when we were accompanying you from Jepara? 'It is now a dream of mine to bring our son to you when he returns from Europe! You and he must get to know each other. It is now a dream of mine to return here with him. And if it is at all possible I will bring him to you.'

Moedertje, do you still remember this? That you said this? And you meant it then, I knew that. I could still show you the spot where you said it to me. It was at the first carriage stop. Mijnheer who heard it even said that there were no mines in Jepara and then you said: 'Then we will come without the mines!'

And when I told my parents about Didi's imminent arrival they immediately said: 'Ask if Mevrouw will come too.' I pass on their request and that of our hearts. Why should that dream of yours to be happy with us in Klein Scheveningen, that is, to partake in our dreams and ideals, not become a reality? Or are you unable to leave home, Moeke? Are you too reluctant to have to leave your dear husband alone again? In that case then we respect your feelings, your decision. Give Didi our love and tell him I thank him for his letter and photograph and shall write to him soon.

We noticed that Mijnheer Sijthoff is jealous of the affection that we have for your husband. He was jealous of our walk along the beach, we had never

done this with him. He wrote to us about it and when we spoke to him he returned to this subject.[48]

'Did you tell Mijnheer A. everything on that walk along the beach, did you speak as you are now speaking to me?'

'That was no longer necessary, Mijnheer A. knew <u>everything long ago</u> already.'

'Do you then correspond with him so much?'

'With his wife, whom we are extremely fond of, about whom we knew nothing before she stood before us for the first time and who won our love the first time our eyes met, the first time our hands touched, when we first heard her voice! We are also very fond of him, we already liked him before we knew him personally and when we did we immediately lost our hearts to him. We instinctively felt 'he is the right man' when we first saw him and spoke with him.'

'But he is not very outgoing?'

'No, but we like him because he is so <u>good</u>, so noble, has such a beautiful soul and spirit, is so high-minded and acts so nobly.'

And Mijnheer S. agreed and was full of praise for our friend.

'He is a fine, good man, too good in fact, <u>too modest</u> to be a Director.'

'That is precisely what we like about him,' we said softly.

Mijnheer S. was silent and looked at us. If he wants us to be as fond of him as we are of you then he will also have to be like you. He now knows how to gain our affection.

We feel so sorry for him. How bitterly he spoke about people that evening. He complained about ingratitude and the hatred people had of each other. We told him that if he was saddened by people's ingratitude then that was <u>his own fault</u>.

He stared at us and asked: 'My fault, if the people are ungrateful towards me?'

'Yes, <u>your</u> fault if you are saddened by it, because we must never do <u>good</u> in order to reap gratitude but simply to gain satisfaction from doing good. I think and believe that the best means to be happy and at the same time to make other people's lives more beautiful is to try as much as possible to understand. The more we understand the less bitterness there will be inside us, the more considerate and just will be our opinions of others. The latter makes the lives of others more beautiful and the former, not feeling embittered, makes us happy.'

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[48] What follows is another example of Kartini's ability to use her command of Dutch language to use sarcasm to deliver the finely honed critique of Dutch colonialism and colonial policy scattered throughout the correspondence.

I can still see him looking at us, wide-eyed. In the end he forgot that he was only talking to us because time and again he forgot to use the informal 'you'. But do not imagine we have convinced him with regard to our plans. He promised support but he is definitely not happy with our decision. All our arguments were met with, 'And yet I would prefer to see you married.' Well, there is nothing much that can be put up against such a powerful argument!

'Why does it have to be you two? Why not leave it to others, it is going to come anyway, sooner or later.' (So, he acknowledges that it will come, that it must come.).

And then the real issue emerged: he had imagined us as the stars in his salon!!

'How you would be celebrated in our salons, you would be there as one of us.'

'It is very kind of you to make salon furniture of us.'

'I did not mean it that way, but you would easily fit in.'

A light flashed in my head: that was why he was always so pleased, showed it in all kinds of ways, when we were present at his receptions and why he was angry that we had not been present at his festivity.

We were exotic furniture as it were, exotic plants in his salon, and he showed off with this!

The uses people make of us! We simply told him our place certainly was not in high society where we felt most uncomfortable because we had learnt to regard content above form and that form without content meant nothing to us. Form must make perfect, content is the main concern, that is what we think.

He cursed Jepara which had made us what we were.

'What would happen if you met someone for whom your heart beat warmly?'

'I would be pleased and grateful because that would mean that I had met a soulmate, and the more soulmates we met, the better it would be for our cause and thus the more it would suit us.'

'You will never meet a soulmate.'

Strong language indeed! Either he has a very low opinion of our men or he places me on an exaggeratedly high plane.

If he only knew that I had just received an enthusiastic letter from a young soulmate I had never met. I will send you the letter one day. It is from a student at the Native Doctor school.[49] A spontaneous expression of support in relation to that piece in *Eigen Haard* that you introduced. This was really boyishly spirited in its glowing enthusiasm, but it undoubtedly contains a unique spirit,

[49] This is further evidence that Kartini was in contact with the students of STOVIA, the most significant group of Western educated Indonesians outside the immediate confines of the colonial administration who initiated the establishment of Budi Utomo in 1908 and from whose ranks most of the leading early nationalists emerged.

a distinct character shone through it. It is the joy of the writer that unknown people feel themselves to be the friends of someone whose writing touched their hearts. I think it is a wonderful idea that it was you who introduced me to the public under my own name. Such an introduction by someone who one loves very much must be a blessing. And, if that piece has had any success then I ascribe that to the fact that it appeared through your assistance.

Much has befallen me as a consequence of its publication but it has not failed to achieve its aim, it has had some success for our artists. As a result of it several (5) not insignificant orders for woodcarvings have been received. I am very grateful for our craftsmen's sake but although I might be good I am not therefore silly. I plan to pass those orders on to Oost en West that will also be in its interests. They will then pass the orders back to me, the advantage being that then I need only deal with one organization, while now I have to deal with many people. I cannot possibly keep up with everything otherwise. Placing the order, explaining it, already takes up so much time, and to carry on a correspondence as well would mean I would have to give all my time to it and that is not possible. I have already so much to do for myself, that is, for our cause.

Do you know what I thought when I received the 4th letter about woodcarving – to put an advertisement in the paper that orders for woodcarving have to be made through Oost en West. I was desperate. People were not always polite, sometimes they had not the slightest appreciation that one could not just demand anything from someone, and particularly not from a complete stranger, and sometimes it seemed as if I had to say 'thank you' as well for them giving me so much to do. It made me agitated, now I have got over it but I still have to answer all the letters that arrived while I was ill. I reprimanded myself that I want what is enjoyable but cannot abide what is unpleasant. And yet they are related.

And now, dearest Moedertje, the kindest regards to Mijnheer and Didi from all of us. You are embraced and kissed by your own devoted daughter

K.

A few words have become hundreds.

Just before, I received a letter from Annie's fiancé – how happy he is, and so is Anneke. How wonderful.

Imagine that silly piece has been translated into Malay in *Perwarta Warna*[50] with illustrations. Fortunately they were at least polite enough to omit our photographs.

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[50] This newspaper is not listed by Adam (1995) in his listing of vernacular language newspapers. Perhaps it was a reference to *Perwarta Wolanda,* later *Bandera Wolanda,* published

To Mevrouw van Kol

21 March 1903[51]

Mr A. discussed all aspects of our plan with us and there is something that till now has escaped our attention and which nevertheless is of great importance. It is this question: How will Native society regard our going to Holland? What is said about us personally is of no concern to us but what it can mean, and certainly will mean for 'the school' is something that, in our youthful optimism – that dares to thumb its nose at the entire world – we totally disregarded.

And this can be a great danger to our plans …

Personally Mr A is very much in favour of our training in H. but as a friend he says: stay![52] The painful memory of father's latest period of illness, which said much about his devotion to us, made us cry bitterly and our heart bleed but had not led us to give up our plan to go to H. After all we had pushed away from us all personal concerns: there could only be one love, for God and for our people. But along came Mr A. and it was the end of our determination.

…

How much our decision cost us you will never know unless you had been with us then. The entire night, after the long conversation with our friend I lay tossing and turning in bed without being able to close my eyes for a second. How could I have when my spirit could not rest. Many thoughts rushed confusedly through my mind, it was as though I lived an entire life in that one night …

And [the school] had to have its own character and not one determined by the government.

An old widow of some social standing will support us. She will look after the domestic arrangements and give the children religious education. That will be a great support for us but her real job will be that of chaperone. At the moment it is impossible in native society to work in public as an unmarried woman.

We have to make everything related to the matter as acceptable as possible for the native world and for that we need to have regard for the outward appearances that it finds important. It would otherwise offend against its

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in the Netherlands to which Kartini's brother Kartono contributed. The article in question appears to have been Kartini's 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje' published in *Eigen Haard*.

51 This letter extract was published in Bouman (1954), 57–58 and reproduced in Allard (1976), 432–33.

52 This is perhaps Kartini's attempt to diplomatically smooth over the differences between the Abendanons' and the van Kols' plans for Kartini in this (belated) explanation to Nellie for her change of plan of which only these extracts have survived.

feeling of propriety and respect if an unmarried woman was active in public. One word in particular must not be mentioned in the interest of success in this project, just that which lies at the heart of our work, that is the goal of our struggle. Never ever may the native society know the enemy against which we are going into battle. That name, that forbidden word is: Polygamy!

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

30 March 1903

My dear, dear kind Moedertje, what would I not give now to be able, instead of calling on the aid of paper and pen, to speak to you in person, now, just at this moment, when you have so much need for tokens of affection, and words of affection. Spoken they would have more power, the trembling voice would reflect what affected the feelings, in the eyes would twinkle what was burning in the heart.

My own, own Moedertje, since it cannot be otherwise, I make use of the only medium at my disposal through which to voice my love. Only paper words – but they are written with a heart full of love and sympathy, I know they are worth more to you than a flood of sweetly spoken words in which the heart is not involved.

What I really wanted to say to you no longer needs to be said; even in silence our souls understand each other, especially now when they are both filled with the very same thought, and our hearts with the same feelings: the sadness about Didi's departure. If we who have never seen him or spoken to him, miss him so much, what then of you both, dear parents who see and speak to him daily. I wrote the dear boy a long letter, my sister has as well. I do not know whether he would have had the time to have read it, let alone been able to tell you of its contents! I was very upset when I first heard that we would not see him, that the paths of our lives which were in fact already so far apart, would be separated even further, with a very big chance that they would never meet. Crying wet tears is not so bad, it lightens the suffering, but crying inside one's heart, with dry eyes – that is terrible. We are both so fond of your boy, we have become so attached to him, that we could not bear the thought that he would go so far away, so unreachably far away from us.[53] And then those golden and rose-coloured dreams which vanished with that news …

[53] This and previous letters to 'Didi', if received, are no longer extant.

All this has had such an impact on me that my heart contracted with pain. I thought of you both, I thought of your boy, and fearfully I asked myself: 'How will they be feeling?' In the course of our lives we must separate so often but we never, never become used to it. A parting from a dear one is and remains painful, no matter how many we have seen leave or have been parted from.

To meet Didi – we day-dreamed about it – the realization of this meeting seemed so close, just lying there for the grasping, and then all of a sudden – bang – the paths which appeared to be coming ever closer together, burst irrevocably apart! And I thought: if his departure, even though we have never seen nor spoken to him, has grieved us so much, what then if we had known him personally, known his voice, the expressions on his face, his mannerisms, if we had known everything which the writing of letters could not reveal to us, what then, what then? We are so emotional, so passionately involved with those we are attached to, we part with such difficulty, each separation in which our heart is involved is so very painful for us, makes us utterly miserable for a long time.

In our love we are like a vine, winding ourselves totally around the object of our affection with countless tendrils and attach ourselves firmly to it with thousands of threads. Wrench the climbing plant loose from the object of its intimate, thousand-armed embrace and it will droop limply down as if all life has been extinguished from it. It will take a long time before it will come alive again.

I think with anxiety and grief of a time in the future that must surely come for you and for me when you kiss us farewell! It pained me so much when I first heard from Annie last year that you would soon be leaving. And when I heard it again from your husband, oh, how I grieved then. I have yet to learn to contain that grief, Moedertje! And I do not believe that it will be easy because, oh Moedertje, I am so very, so deeply fond of you all! Oh God, teach me submission. When the time comes, teach me to give up what I must. Now I am not able to think about it without great pain. Now I think perhaps it was good for us that the meeting with Didi remained a dream. If we had come to know him personally then perhaps we would have come to grow too fond of him and we would have been utterly devastated when we had to part from him.

I can remember only too well how I squirmed and wriggled in my grief when I had to part from Kartono, when I had to watch him leave. I thought I would die from the pain inside me. We have now become so fond of your boy, he is so dear, so kind, so intelligent! We are so very grateful that we have been able to meet him in spirit. Our friendship constitutes a part of my happiness. I believe in a God of infinite love who directs us with love for our own good.

I will no longer protest against a fate that at first seemed so cruel. Let us believe it was for our own good. It was good that you had not told us beforehand

that Didi would have liked us to have stayed with you; it would only have caused us grief if it had not been possible.

We are very grateful that Didi is also fond of us. Our friendship is so beautiful, so rare, so pure, God grant that it may always remain what it is, our joy and our comfort. I have promised Didi that, should it be granted us to be able to come to Batavia, that we will do our best for as long as you are still there, to be good, obedient daughters for you, to make up somewhat for your great, great loss!

What a lot we will constantly have to talk about concerning your boy, our brother. You must tell us everything about him, I insist!

Moedertje, I thank you very much for your trust in me. I hope to never disappoint you. That this trust is mutual I will not have to tell you. Almost every letter of mine that you receive is witness to it. And again with this one, in which I freely reveal my thoughts to you. In my heart I have been constantly with you since I heard of Didi's imminent departure. That will be the day after tomorrow. God grant you strength. Courage, courage, my dears, it is for the good of your beloved, the child of your heart. I hope sincerely that he will find in Europe what he is seeking and what he needs.

We do think it very kind of him to be willing to take something for Kartono, to go and visit him. Oh, I fervently hope that my two brothers will become close friends for life. That would be heavenly! And later, Kartono must meet the two of you. He is such a dear boy, whom I love very much, but you have known this for a long time. We have received very good news about him recently from his guardian.[54] His professors are apparently very pleased with him. It is wonderful, and he is working so well, he is totally involved in his work.

How sad the boy will be that we will not be coming. I am very curious to know what Didi will think of him – and Mas To of Didi.[55]

Oh, Moedertje, what heavy dark days you have ahead of you. First to see the child of your heart leave, and then soon thereafter your sister! Courage, Moedertje dearest, courage! You have already withstood so much, this grief you will also survive.

While it is terrible for me to have to be parted from you – I hope for your sake that your wish will be fulfilled entirely as you would have it. The peace that you searched for here in vain you will find in far-distant Europe. What a relief it will be for you both when you can put behind you that enervating round of

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54 Professor JHC Kern (1833–1917) was Professor of Oriental Studies and Languages. He was born in central Java.

55 Kartini clearly hoped her brother would form a close relationship with Abendanon's youngest son.

receptions, etc., and you can say, 'that is now finished with!' Yet you will also leave behind much that is dear, the work that is close to your husband's heart …

But what am I doing – I am going to make you more sad instead of cheering you up. What did I say to Didi recently: 'I am not suited to being a comforter.'

I have not even thanked you for the charming calendar. So kind of you to send it to us – we are very pleased with it. What fine sentiments it contains. Many thanks for it, dearest!

I have been writing so irregularly to you recently – this is because my books have been taking up so much of my time. What do you think, I am now able to prove that 2 + 3 is the same as 3 + 2 ? Don't you think this is extraordinarily clever of me? Oh, I think it is terrible work, I much prefer to do 20 difficult sums than read one page of arithmetical theory. It is so meaningless and one has no benefit from it in real life. What one learns from it is logical thinking and reasoning, and that is something. Oh, do not imagine great things of my intelligence, you might be disappointed. I still have so much to learn.

But now I will finish, dearest! Give Mijnheer warmest regards from us all. Hold close to your heart your own devoted daughter

Kartini

Resident of Semarang, P Sijthoff, to Governor General of the Netherlands Indies

27 April 1903[56]

I have the honour to respectfully present to your Excellency a petition dated Jepara 19 April 1903 from the Raden Ajengs Kartini and Roekmini, daughters of the Regent of Jepara – for Javanese women to be given the opportunity to be enabled to undertake useful work in the form outlined in the accompanying memorandum.

The unsatisfactory situation as regards the raising of children is correctly portrayed by the writers and should they be able in their future work to contribute to its improvement by warning prospective mothers, then in that alone they would deserve the gratitude of the general public and any subsidies provided would be fully justified.

It is a universally recognised fact for any program of public education to have any real impact, it must also involve the contribution of women and now

[56] From KITLV Archive No. H897:32. See also Sijthoff's official recommendation in support of the petition outlined in the general introduction of this volume.

that two educated and respectable, high-born girls have offered themselves to work to this end, it is appropriate to accept the offer with both hands.

The suggestion has not appeared on impulse but has been thoroughly thought through and has already been a subject of consideration and discussion for a number of years. The memorandum is entirely their own work.

I would strongly advise against allowing the writers of this memorandum to go to Europe. The overwhelming mass of experiences that they would have there would merely confuse them. Moreover, they would only mix in circles where issues of etiquette would be more significant than spiritual development and charmers such as they are would be so feted that they would lose their inner contentment.

The request to gain further education in Batavia for their future work is not expensive. Their father finds himself in too poor a financial situation to be able to pay for this training himself.

As the petitioners have already discussed their plans in detail with the Director of Education, Religion and Industry, I believe, finally, that I conclude by respectfully recommending a positive response to the petition.

To Mijnheer Abendanon

19 April 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon

Your letter and the enclosed postal order for *f*123.95 arrived safely and I thank you very much for it. The labour costs for the 3 bedak boxes is *f*10, for which you have already sent me *f*6, thus leaving a remainder of *f*4.

What a terrible mess I have landed Moedertje with in regard to those dringins; I regret it very much, please will you return them to me? You do believe me that I did it in good faith? I really believed that they would be wanted since Heer v. L.v. P. frequently sent telegrams concerning them. I do worry very much about it, please send them back to me.

I have earned a severe reprimand from you, for this and for other things that I must confess to you presently, but first I want to say something about Didi.

Yesterday we received a card from him from Padang. Well, we were so pleased with it! He is such a fine, dear boy. Oh, we so hope that he will find in Europe what he is looking for. We are following him in our thoughts: we are constantly searching the newspapers for reports about him. We have read that he sailed through Suez on the 17th. In a few days time he will be in Holl. Oh, may he find all his loved ones there in good health.

We think it was very nice of him that he is willing to go and visit Kartono, and completely of his own accord. That is really nice! We will be very happy if our brothers become good friends! Heer v. Overveldt wrote that the professors are extremely pleased with Mas To. That is wonderful – you are also pleased, aren't you?

How are you both?

Oh, what a terrible daughter I am for my Moedertje! I have simply neglected my beloved, and that at a time when she has such need of kindness. I cannot forgive myself! The problem is I cannot write Moedertje letters I have just dashed-off. When I am writing to her, then I cannot stop to do other things – also very necessary tasks – that must then of course be left undone. And at the moment that must not happen.

And now you know immediately what one of my greatest weaknesses is: self-restraint is something I very much need to learn. It is very good that people have recently been pointing this out to me. I often look longingly at my writing folder – but I must restrain myself, I cannot always give in to my passion for writing – that can only be a recreation for me.

The other reprimand that I deserve from you is for the late sending of the petition. It was so unfortunate that my illness intervened. In the initial days of my recovery I could not concentrate on it, I was not allowed to. When I was able to work once again, we had to go to Semarang, after which Soelastri came to stay. They were very busy days, and when calm returned here once more and I could recommence on it, I was unable to because I had lost the sense of it. The memorandum had to be written from the heart, you said, and that would not open at my command and so there was nothing else to do but patiently wait for the return of my inspiration to write; without it I cannot even get the most insignificant piece written. When, one morning, I felt in the mood, I wrote the memorandum in one sitting. Petition and memorandum were completed when your letter arrived but we still had to wait for an opportune moment to pass them to the Ass. Res. because in this matter we could not just think of ourselves, we had also to think of others who could be caused grief if a less than opportune moment was chosen.[57]

Our path is strewn with catches and traps. In the meantime I had written to the Resident with whom we are now good friends.[58] This morning the documents left our hands: God's angels must have been with us on our difficult

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57 As an official petition and memorandum to the colonial government it had to be presented formally through the local official, the assistant resident, to be passed up to the resident in Semarang and hence to Batavia.

58 She refers to Resident Sijthoff whom she had so often ridiculed.

road. Oh, Miracle! We were totally dumbfounded by the warmth of the reception we received. It was coated in sugar and honey.

Our ideas, beliefs, were precisely his – yes, he even considered an education in Europe better! Everything was fine. Sadly I thought of that evening when we were so severely chastised. 'The world likes to be deceived!' Now for the first time I am beginning to understand the meaning of this saying. Oh vanity! It is said your name is woman, it is true – and also, that woman is created for man! No, we had not said anything we did not mean … but not to say something can also be meaningful! We can quite easily argue our innocence; that it is not our fault if others see more than what we intended in what we say and do, but is not to leave them under a misapprehension equally sinful?

God forgive us! If only one could be but invisible.

We have just received a letter from Heer G. in which he wrote that our life would not be easy but would surely become richer – signed your dev. friend. What more could we want?

The Resident is now spoiling us again. When we had visited him after you had been here we had told him everything we had in mind, frankly, exactly as it was. If he had wanted to read more into it, that was his business.

It seems as though he is only now getting to know what we are. When recently we attended a reception that he gave, he revealed to us his feelings in a manner totally different to that to which we were accustomed. Normally we would be totally drowned in compliments, everyone had to know what amazing beings we were, very pleasant for us I can assure you! I often felt that I was some kind of idiot. This last time however he honoured us with a meaningful silence. That then was in accord with the desires of the pretentious noble ladies!

My brother-in-law, Tjokrohadisosro,[59] became Wedono last month but, instead of a good location, which he had been promised, was given the most wretched district in the region. The Res. wrote to me that if he could return that area to prosperity he would immediately be made Patih. Well, we will have to hope for the best.

I read in the paper that Professor Treub is here again.[60] Would you be so kind, when convenient, to tell us briefly if the Agricultural School provides the opportunity to be trained as assistant forester? If Moelijono goes there then another son of a Regent (of Kutoarjo) will go with him. Nice, don't you think. In the meantime I hope that Moelijono will pass the exam to let him into the fourth year.

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[59] Husband of her older sister, Soematri.

[60] Professor Melchior Treub had been director of the Bogor Botanical Gardens from 1880 and became famous for his promotion of botanical research.

Shortly we will have the Regent and Raden Ayu of Surabaya to stay, and after them probably other Regents from East Java, who are now suddenly remembering their relationship to us. Still these acquaintances are worthwhile, despite everything. So long as the train that will bring them here does not become derailed between Semarang and Kudus![61] For many reasons we are pleased with this forthcoming visit – amongst other reasons because we will have the opportunity personally to explain in detail our aims to people who are in a position to obstruct or promote the course of things.[62]

And now, something pleasant! The mother-in-law of my sister Soelastri will be pleased to chaperone us anywhere although she would most prefer Magelang, of course, where she has family and friends and who are all in favour of free education. My brother-in-law was immediately in favour. The Raden Ayu had already intended to locate herself in Magelang. So this is now arranged.[63]

And now, where shall we stay in Batavia? We will discuss with Moedertje once more what the best thing to do would be: boarding with a lady, and then of course, preferably in your area, or at a boarding school.

And now, goodnight. It is late already! Give Moedertje kind regards from us both and to you our best wishes.

Your
Kartini

To Stella Zeehandelaar

25 April 1903

It is cowardly, it is unforgivable, that we did not immediately write you personally when the big decision was taken not to make use of the results of all your noble work… No one could be more surprised at this outcome than we ourselves. We had expected anything, yet never that, of our own free will, we could have said: 'We will stay!'[64]

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61 The hope was that these visitors would not talk with her uncle, the Regent of Demak.

62 Indirectly regents could influence the colonial government in this matter, which related to 'Javanese tradition'.

63 Kartini here confirms her own plan to use her teacher training in Batavia to establish her school in Magelang.

64 This confirms that Kartini had delayed informing Stella for three months, when she could no longer change her mind as the petition to study in Batavia had already been submitted, a decision she had first confirmed in her letter to Abendanon of 25 January 1903.

Do not think of us, think of our cause and what would be best for that; that is what we have to resign ourselves to. Oh! Do not think that our attitude has changed, not in the least. Even now while our petition [for financial assistance to study in Batavia] is already on its way to the Governor General, we are certain that an education in Europe for us would be of great advantage to our future pupils. However, alongside this stands another truth. 'For the cause as it stands at the moment, our remaining in the Indies would be better.'

You know that it has been, and continues to be, one of our greatest dreams to go to Europe to continue our education. Can you understand what it has cost us to give this up? It was a terrible struggle to come to this conclusion. Had we given in to our deepest desires, then we would have been only doing what we wanted, because we know that the cause would be better served in another way. Now we are not attending to our own interests but to the interests of the cause. At the moment we will serve it best by staying in this country. The public whom we wish to serve has yet to get to know us. If we should leave now, then we would estrange ourselves from it. And when we returned in several years' time we would be regarded as European women. And where people do not want to entrust their daughters to Europeans, even less would they want to entrust them to someone whom they regard as a Europeanized Javanese woman.

Our object is our people. And should this be taken from us, of what use would government assistance be? The issue now is to get to work as soon as possible to confront the public with a reality: the existence of a school for native girls.

At the moment, we are the focus of attention, are known throughout Java: we must keep the fire burning. Should we go away, and stay away for a long time, that interest would diminish and gradually disappear. We must make ourselves known personally to our public and attempt to gain its support and encourage it to place its trust in us. Once we have that support and trust, then we could leave without fear. The plan to go to Holland will not entirely disappear, Stella. We can always go. And if we do that from Batavia, that would be better than from here. In the first place, the old folks: they would have become accustomed to having us at a distance, and they would be able to accept a greater distance more readily. It would also be better for us. You see, we have never been away from home. And to be suddenly transplanted from our warm nest, from our land, to another environment in a foreign country, or far from everything that is dear to us – that change would be too great.

But that is beside the point, we had always known that, and we had never worried about that. The main issue is the danger to our enterprise – we had

never realized that because of haughty self-confidence, or self-confident pride, whatever you want to call it. Totally involved in our own excitement, we thought little, if anything, of the opinion of our public. Indeed, we even took pride in defying it where its opinion was different to ours, completely ignoring its criticism where we were thoroughly convinced of the correctness of our aims, our efforts, or our actions. We continue to believe that what we want is right, but in this instance, we must not take this view, we must take account of the attitudes of the public. After all, it is for the public we want to work and then it is not appropriate to have it against us by roughly interfering in its ideas, with which it was raised and grew old.

Patience! The wise counsellors advised us; we heard it but did not comprehend it. Only now we understand, Stella, now we know what is the watchword of every reformer – Patience! We cannot hasten the course of events, but we can delay it by rushing ahead. If the public sets itself against us, then this would delay change. People would be fearful of giving their daughters an enlightened education if this produced such impossible creatures as we are made out to be to the public.

Patience! Infinite patience! Stella, I was so moved when this truth dawned on me. We must restrain ourselves, and guard against the possibility that with our fervour and determination we do not overtake our goal. Mevrouw van Kol wrote: 'To achieve an ideal, one has to renounce many, many dreams'. The first dream we have set aside is to present ourselves to the public as we are.

We must not do this, the public must never know what we are fighting against. The name of the enemy against which we are going into battle must never, never be heard: polygamy. If this were known, then no one would give us their child to be educated. This disturbs me greatly, it seems to me as if we are taking up our task with a lie. Our wish was that people would get to know us as we are, and then, from conviction, give us their children.

This is impossible. We have yet to begin our task, and already we see our dreams disappear one by one!

Oh, Stella, do not make our renunciation of this desire even greater by being sad about it. It is difficult enough for us already. You have always known that it was a dear, dear dream of mine to come to your country to gather wisdom for our people there. Let me not speak about it anymore. I thank you, also on behalf of my parents, for everything you have done for us … and for nothing. No, Stella, your work, the work undertaken by all of you, was not for nothing. Even if at the moment we are not making use of the fruits of your work, it has been of great value for the cause. Attention has been focused on it, and well-intentioned people are giving consideration to the issue. The fruit

of such consideration will be of benefit to our people. Already, people who exercise some influence in the matter have asked us about the education of the Javanese people.

Would this have ever happened if you and your friends had not focused the interest of those well-intentioned people on us? Would the Government, would others, have been prepared to help had you and your people not gone into battle for us? Stella, once more, a thousand times, thank you for your great, great love! No dearest, your work, your efforts have not been in vain. On behalf of our people, I thank you with all my heart. All your efforts will be to the benefit of the Javanese.

Our plans are, as soon as we get an affirmative response to our petition, to go immediately to Batavia.[65] Roekmini will go to become skilled in drawing, needlework, hygiene, medical and firstaid. In drawing, she will get lessons from a teacher at the gymnasium and, for hygiene, she will have lessons at the Doktor-Jawa school. I will study to become a teacher, which I already began several months ago under the supervision of a headmaster. I will only enrol to gain one qualification. As soon as I have that, our school will be opened either in Magelang or in Salatiga, both cool, fine places that have many doctors (medical officers).[66]

We have great plans: when the school is established, and everything is functioning well, then we want to establish a course for women doctors, nurses and obstetricians where instruction will be given by medical officers, and which will be supervised by Roekmini. Something like this could only exist if it was under the direction of a respectable and cultured woman.[67]

We have also asked the Government for a subsidy for the establishment of a school. Should that be refused then we will seek private assistance. Perhaps we may still apply to the Queen.

This had also been Father's idea: to study in the Indies, and after that, in order to extend our horizons, to go to Europe and not, as we had first intended, to study in Europe, and then stay there for several years.

It is just one year ago that I wrote to you so joyously happy about the visit of Heer van Kol. And exactly a year later, you have to receive this. Stella, love

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65 The decision arrived on 8 July. It was then too late since the previous day Kartini's father had written to accept the marriage proposal of the Regent of Rembang.

66 This depended on where her 'chaperone' would reside. Magelang was a major military garrison town. Salatiga was an important market town and centre of a large European community.

67 Kartini presents Stella with a more elaborate plan than she has recounted anywhere else, undoubtedly as part of her justification to her for changing her initial plan.

me a little still: out of loyalty to that great love you once had for me, I beg you. Love me just a little still.[68]

To Mijnheer Abendanon

14 May 1903

Highly Esteemed Heer Abendanon

Many thanks for sending the *Java News* regarding the Agricultural School at Buitenzorg. How unfortunate for our brother that at the moment the course does not extend to providing a preparation for Government service. His hope had been to gain a position with the forestry department. Father has had him registered for the fourth year of the course. From this you can conclude that he did pass. Moelijono is very interested in agricultural pursuits and everything concerned with plants. For this reason he would still be very much interested in going to Buitenzorg even if he cannot be trained for forestry. Could he not later find a position with the State botanical gardens after having successfully completed the Agricultural school? If there were a chance for this he would go to Buitenzorg.

What a lot of trouble we create for you! There is always something, now this, then that. And you just listen patiently.

Oh, if you only knew how your name was mentioned here by young and old! The saints would envy you, could they hear it! How happy you made me with the news that you read our memorandum with so much pleasure. I was so afraid that in my innocence, I may have mentioned things I ought not to have. Now I am content, if you think it is all right, then everything is fine.

Do not set too high expectations of our abilities to study, you will end up being sadly mistaken. Please do not think I am saying this out of politeness, oh no, I am speaking the pure truth. It would be pure good luck if, after a year of study, I was able to undertake the examination. I do not think there is a chance.

It is said that I am not unintelligent, this might be so outside of the school but I think differently and am convinced that the school or course where I will end up, will not have a more stupid pupil than me. It is regrettable, but true. I am thinking of the son of Mijnheer van Kol; he is a well-rounded fellow but in school he is the least intelligent in his class. A fine prospect! Yet we are not dreading it, as you know, and we will do what we can. You can depend on it

[68] There are no subsequent letters to Stella extant. If there was any later correspondence, evidence suggests Stella refused to make these available for publication.

that we will always do our best, more we cannot do, can we. We so hope that you will yet be able to see our school, that would be heavenly.

Have you now both returned from Sukabumi? And did it all go according to plan? And how are you both? Thank Moedertje very much from us both for your lovely long letter. We have had extremely busy days and extremely busy days lie ahead …

One could give up in despair. We were planning to write to Moedertje tomorrow evening when we were informed that the family from Demak were coming over. The very next free day we will devote entirely to Moeske. In the meantime could you tell her something pleasant, the small tables are ready and will be sent off on Sunday.

How are things with Didi? He has now arrived in H. hasn't he? We are very much looking forward to some news from him.

Recently I received some nice snapshots of sawahs, I am now awaiting the padi to ripen, in order to conjure up something about it and if that turns out all right, it and the photos will be sent off to Holland to be printed. That is all right with you, isn't it?

I am trying so hard to learn to speak and write your beautiful language, but I do not see myself making any headway. Long ago I really believed that I knew Dutch, but now I know that that is not the case. For a Javanese perhaps, I speak and write Dutch fairly well, but oh… It does no harm to realize that one is rather stupid, that saves one from pedantry. I know very well that I still have so much to learn, before I can claim to be able to speak and write good Dutch. How amazingly difficult your language is, but delightful nonetheless.

Give Moedertje warm greetings from us all, and also many regards to you from the whole kabupaten.

With much love to you both, your devoted
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

18 May 1903

My dearest Moedertje,

What a daughter you have, it is scandalous, she just ignores you! Moeske??, can you forgive me? It grieves me personally so much! Actually it is really a pity that a human being does not have a double pair of hands and two heads. We would like to do so much but we are bound by the fact that we have only one head and two hands.

Extremely busy days are now behind us and … busy days are to come. Oh, Moeske, I so hate all that activity but I must not remove myself from it for the sake of my dear Parents.

Need I still tell you how extremely pleased we were with your lovely, long letter? We will not answer it now, Moeske, a brief note would be an outrage against heaven but a long letter cannot be written now.

This serves only to tell you that tomorrow 2 sono wood tables will be sent off to you. They have been made in the style of the previous one but I hope you will nevertheless like them. One is for you and one for Edie. Two others are in the process of being made, one for Moedertje and one for Edie. They will be real delights! Two surfaces of the same size will rest on small curved legs – one above the other. I will send you a drawing of it. Yours will stand on 3 legs and Edie's on four. The shape of yours is different to that of Edie's. They can be unscrewed. I can see them already, real treasures.

Also you will very soon receive your beautiful portrait stand, made of white wood. Yesterday we went to Blakang Gunung. We so enjoyed ourselves, both because of the fine craftwork we saw, and because of the noticeable improvement in the material conditions of our artists! How Singo's house has changed since we were there last. He now has a stone and wood house! It is wonderful! They looked so happy! Oh, you should just see them at work! The little urchins who he is teaching are already so talented. It is a delight to see three children at work! We went there yesterday with three close acquaintances. And it is as I had expected, now that they have been there their regard for the art of our simple artists is even greater. How you also would have enjoyed it, had you been with us yesterday.

That enjoyment we will never share together Moeske!

How are you both? I sincerely hope everything is as you wish it! What news of Didi? If you receive kabar about his eyes then you will let us know?

In the chest with the tables you will find 3 tins, Terrong-Blanda in water, which Mijnheer liked so much when His Excellency was here. When we get some more terrong we will preserve some for you. Father had it planted at the Muria.[69] We will have a palagelei made for Didi as soon as our palas are ripe. The trees are loaded.

Excuse my messy writing, I have to write quickly otherwise I will be called away before it is finished.

Imagine, Moeske, what we recently received from Holland! – An omber book. An omber book itself is not so extraordinary, but what accompanied it

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[69] A reference to the area of the Gunung Muria, the volcano inland from Jepara.

is very revealing: we received that omber book in recognition for our efforts in promoting popular culture in Java. We were sent it by the writer of the letter, a brother-in-law of the parliamentarian, Pijnacker Hordijk.[70] The omber book and popular culture, they go together so well !! It looks beautiful, gilt edges, white spine, with a white ribbon as a bookmark! Someone else sent us dried flowers, a bekakas, for the same reason. Because we love our country so much it is apparently self-evident that we are also very interested in what is produced by the vegetable kingdom of our country!

Of course, why not! We should now become botanists! – if we are not already.

But, in the meantime, we have all remained well and that is the most important thing.

Now you will no doubt want to know how much the tables cost – *f*60 + *f*1 transportation to Sem. = *f*61.

We will see if we cannot write you a long letter this week. We have so much to ask you, to tell you …

Now just a word about the stands requested by Heer v. Lawick – when His Excellency was here in January. His Excellency also indicated how many he wanted. Just ask him. The tortoiseshell box is progressing well. The silverwork is very good.

Goodbye Moeske! Give Mijnheer regards from us all and for you a hearty kiss from sister and your own daughter

Kartini

I have received another pile of good books, mainly historical books. Now I don't think history is dry any more – I love it. Oh Moeske, we are so very, very happy that we are allowed, that our parents have given us full permission. That we are going to study is now something that they accept as normal and that, for this reason, we will be going to Batavia, God willing.

They are not at all concerned about adat, etc. We are so happy about it. Of course they do not like the fact that we will be leaving them but they completely agree with our plans, our endeavour, with our aims. They entrust us not to people, but to God! Now we are beginning to perceive something of the meaning of the word 'patience'.

Reform is the product of the times! It is not brought into being by the will of a single person.

Goodbye dearest, you are warmly embraced by your daughter.

K

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70 This was JM Pijnacker Hordijk mentioned earlier. The gift may have been a book of popular card games.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

29 May 1903

Postcard

Dear, kind Moedertje,

Better something than absolutely nothing! The long letter, I regret, will have to remain a little longer in the pen! It has been very busy the whole week and tomorrow we have to go away once again. It is a bitter duty, tomorrow we are going to visit Uncle, we do not yet know when we will return.[71] But there will not be much time for letter writing because I will, of course, have to catch up with everything I have missed.

How are you both, dearest? Everything is fine I hope! We intend, one of these days, to place some woodcarvings on display in Semarang with Van Dorp. You both approve, don't you?

Our artists are earning money hand over fist, now their talent is becoming known and appreciated. What news of Didi? This afternoon I received a long letter from Nellie v. Kol. Oh, we cannot thank God sufficiently for sending her to us! It is in answer to my letter in which I wrote to her of our changed plans.

She wrote delightfully – we are so pleased with it. Moedertje, I yearn to be able to speak at length with you once more, but I cannot! Oh! and there is so much that I would so want to say!

Goodbye, Moeske dearest, please give your husband our heartiest greetings from us all. For you a hearty kiss from R. and your own daughter,

K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

7 June 1903

My own dearest Moedertje,

Finally, a free day, at last! An entire Sunday morning all to myself – of course I devote it entirely to my Moeske, that dear love who has been waiting for so long for a decent letter from her daughter! Still, it is wonderful that I have so little spare time. It does mean that I do not spend my days in idleness, or in complaining and sighing. We are living at such a pace, we are flying along with it, and yet it is too fast for us!

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[71] In retrospect this was a significant visit. It is likely to have been the occasion when Kartini's father was convinced to agree to a marriage arrangement.

How are you both? I sincerely hope everything is as you wish it. And what is the news from Didi? He promised us a letter from H. and we have been looking forward to one even though we know there will not be one for a long while. As long as I hear from you that all is well with him I will be content. And how are your other boys? And your future daughter-in-law? How is she?

Recently we made the acquaintance of a very young thing who reminded me very much of Mary. She was so delicate, so fine and had such a cheerful happy personality – and yet she had experienced much, that young thing. You see, all your daughters should be like that! They would then suit their Moedertje very well. We thought that the young thing was about 15 or 16, and could hardly believe it when we heard that she was a mother. That slender, delicate thing, a mother! I very much regretted being seated so far away from her so that I was unable to speak with her.

It was at Uncle's house that I met her together with many others. We had resolved that we would only reply with a 'yes' or a 'no' to anything people might say to us that night hoping thereby to keep people away from me. All was going extremely well until a young man came over to us, the husband of that charming child-mother! He began by saying that he knew our Kartono very well, had undertaken the examination with him. Involuntarily I listened with some interest to him, but nevertheless still resisted. But then he began talking about art – our glorious Javanese art (in front of us they were performing the wayang orang) – about our people, about Islam, etc., and before I knew it I had entered into a lively discussion with him.

So you see how the best resolutions can come to nought!

That evening I heard so much of interest that I had not known before. The young woman has been in the Indies for over a year already, her maiden name is Juffrouw van Haren Noman, from Amsterdam, and he is a descendant of the great Multatuli.

How we enjoyed that divinely beautiful wayang dance. There was one dancer we could not take our eyes off. He was divine – danced beautifully and was handsome. It was a woman, but was meant to impersonate a man.[72]

What they presented to us was heavenly, an expression of proud strength and yet so gracious and refined. That is what is so beautiful, so sublime, in our art: the clear subtle grace in every line, in every movement! I will never forget those festive days in Demak, I know that for certain. We went to bed late but we did not actually sleep. How could we? While outside the gamelan continued playing so magically and a human voice sang so wonderfully above it! It was

[72] It was customary for female parts to be danced by men.

heavenly! We could not sleep – the song of the sirens held us imprisoned and in our heart the thought arose: this will no doubt be for the last time. In Batavia we will not hear such beautiful gamelan and singing. To me it was as if I took my leave from my youth in those days.

Each phase of our life has had its own charm, and each leave-taking its sadness.

Dear, dear Moeske, will you help us through the first days in that strange place? Love us even more at the time when we will no longer have the sight of familiar faces around us that are essential to our happiness. We can do without a lot, but not love.

You know, don't you, that our petition was sent off some time ago. What will the answer be? If all goes well then our days at home are numbered. And still we do not yet know where we will be staying in Batavia. Will our Moedertje take it upon herself to arrange for the accommodation of her daughters with kind people? What do you think would be the best thing for us, dearest?

R is not at all keen on a boarding school, it is so restrictive but for me it has some advantages: permanent assistance with my study and I would not have to leave the house to take classes. For my sister it is a little different: wherever she stays, she will always have to take classes elsewhere. And with regard to the boarding school, she could only experience the negative side, the restrictiveness. Also we would not like to share a room with strangers. Even were it just a cell, if we could regard it as our very own, we would be happy.

But what would I do about my lessons if we had to board with a family? We would prefer to live in your neighbourhood, and then preferably with someone who would be able to help me with my work.

This is just an idea on my part. We will of course never get things entirely the way we want them. So, please think about this for us. And whatever Moedertje decides, that will be the best thing for us.

We have had to promise Mama never to separate from each other and to remain true to our ideals!

At night:

I was not allowed my beautiful free morning, they nibbled away several hours of it. And so now I am continuing this discussion at night.

This afternoon I received your letter. Thank you very much for it and for the postal order for *f*61. An extra hearty kiss for what you wrote about the carving. That is necessary. It is not always pleasurable to hear the truth but that is the only means of outgrowing our mistakes, and for that reason I appreciate it very much when opinions are expressed frankly.

Of course I am most upset that the woodcarving arrived damaged. The items really did leave here in good condition, you surely do not believe that we would send off broken things to you? You know us better than that. I think it has less to do with the wood than with the rough treatment en route. I conclude from this that I cannot allow these people to pack the goods without supervision. The parcel that went to Japan we attended to ourselves. It is therefore our fault.

I will of course give the workmen the message. What a shame. I have such sakit ati that those beautiful things arrived damaged. Can they not be sent back? Then I can arrange for them to be repaired. Will you ask O. en W.? From now on, everything which has to be sent off we will once again pack ourselves. I really believe it depends on the packaging.

But is it not also possible that the small boxes were damaged when they fitted the hinges and locks which, at the request of Heer v. Lawick, had to be done in Batavia? We were worried about that here. You see, here the fitting of the hinges and locks occurs when the box has not yet been put together. Now jati, and particularly sono wood is amazingly hard. Through hammering, the box could split apart and, for the same reason, the legs could be broken. Anyway, we will go to Blakang Gunung again to inspect things.

We had thought that our workmen were better than those of Heer G..[73] This is what Annie thought as well. But one can be mistaken. The message is, strict supervision!

Moeske, Moeske you are confusing me. In your previous letter you wrote: 'When I tell you that I would like to order many small items, I do not mean for instance, paper knives, blotting paper pads, hombre boxes, etc., etc.' And now you write: 'Would you order for me a collection of small objects such as went to Japan, all kinds of small boxes, paper knives, racks, etc., etc.'

This latter will then be what we agree to, yes, Moeske? It will work out extremely well – there are a lot of these small items that have not yet been claimed, but you cannot have them until they have first been admired in Sem. I will send you a list of what it comprises. Can I send you the entire collection? You can then check for yourself the cause of the fault, poor workmanship, poor packaging, or the fitting of the hinges and locks.

O. en W. have requested firescreens. As it happens 3 are ready which, in my opinion, are very fine, an opinion shared by others. But Batavia has such refined taste!

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[73] This presumably a reference to Assistant Resident Gonggrijp.

And now I must ask your advice on a difficult matter. Mej. Tromp[74] who has stayed with you, has sought my help to obtain some woodcarving. I directed her to O. en W. She preferred not to, this time she wanted to have it directly from Jepara, later she would obtain it through the intermediary of O. en W. Silly me, I gave in and assisted her – and now she wants to tell her sister to send me money for the wages of the woodcarvers – she prefers not to order through O. en W., it takes too long!!! What do I do now? I think it is mean towards O. en W. in the Indies. What reply should I give Mej. Tromp?

And this is an example of: 'promoting the interests of the Native'! Bah! How petty-minded people are. You will give me an answer on this, won't you?

And now about the editors of *Eigen Haard*. I have written to Dr Pijzel but he cannot yet have received my letter, of course not, since I have only just posted it with the last mail. It was not nice of me to have made Dr P. wait so long. But, as I have already told you, I was rather annoyed because our photographs were printed without us first being informed about it.[75] I had to get over this first otherwise I would not have been able to write a friendly letter.

Also rather petty of me! Would you not have found it unpleasant if you were in my position? We know only too well that for many we serve as publicity! That is very pleasant, I can assure you! I am not bothered by it now. But as long as our cause, or my countrymen, will benefit from it – of what consequence are personal discomforts? Everything for our people.

You have no need to reprimand me about the many letters which I write, I am just getting my ears boxed from all sides for writing so little, or not at all!

'But my child, what is it that you are doing then?' I hear you exclaim in surprise. Well Moeske, guess! I am going to learn Dutch! I have such a poor command of it, and, for someone who is going to sit an exam, this is not a good thing. The examination for the certificate of assistant may be insignificant but if one does not have a good command of Dutch, then one cannot succeed in it. So many Dutch girls have failed the Dutch exam,[76] what chance then do I have as a Javanese? And my pronunciation is terrible. I do not want to shame Moedertje when I come to Batavia. Moedertje's daughter must be able to speak, write and read, decent Dutch. And at the moment it leaves much to be desired! It is good for me to know what a dunce I am. I cannot now understand

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74 This is probably the daughter of Mevrouw van Zuylen-Tromp, president of Oost en West.

75 This relates to the photograph published in *Eigen Haard* of 3 January 1903 to accompany her article. The photograph was provided by Nellie van Kol on condition that *Eigen Haard* obtain permission, which in its editorial it stated it would. See editor's introduction reproduced in this volume on pp. 739–41.

76 This is probably a reference to Dutch girls in the colony, many of whom were of mixed parentage with limited exposure to standard Dutch.

how, having such a poor command of the language, I had the courage to have articles published in Dutch! The more ignorant, the more audacious!

I am certainly not satisfied with the expression 'she can read and write quite well for a Javanese!' Moeske's daughter must be able to do more than this.

I am now reading Potgieter which is amazingly difficult Dutch. Oh, oh, oh, what a lot of mistakes I made when I read it aloud.

There is a lot involved in learning Dutch, that's for sure! I wish I also had brains like Mas To. In his exams he gained 9 and 10 for each of the 4 languages. According to Heer v. Sandick,[77] Mas To speaks better Dutch than many native Dutch speakers. If only his sister could imitate him.

Nellie says I should now wean my friends. I had already been doing this before I received her letter. And our debt to our friends will have to be paid later to a younger generation!

I almost entirely forgot to answer your question about the goldsmith. You will no doubt remember that Heer Zimmerman advised the goldsmith to go to Jokja instead of Solo. Well I went to some trouble to get him safely to Jokja[78] but without success. He knows nothing and no one there, I do not dare let him poke around there on his own. We have acquaintances there but we do not know them well enough to give them that task. In Solo we have family and friends. He will go there. The regent in charge of the police will ensure that he will find somewhere to stay and obtain what he needs. But I first want to get him to complete all the tortoiseshell boxes before sending him off. You and the others have already been waiting for so long that it would not do to let you wait longer for them. They will be real treasures, Moeske!

I know nothing of the technical school in Demak. No one in Demak has spoken about it. I also read something like that in the paper. But I do not believe that the craft of goldsmith can be very advanced there because Aunt has all her goldwork done elsewhere.

I will write about your <u>woodcarving</u> on another occasion. I am now too sleepy.

The Sunan is coming to Sem., you surely already know that.[79] Mijnheer Sijthoff wrote asking me to come, he wants to present me to His Excellency!!! I correspond with him quite a lot, I feel so sorry for him.

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77 RA van Sandick (1855–1933), an engineer, became prominent in progressive politics with a particular interest in the East Indies and member of the Institut Colonial International.

78 Yogyakarta

79 This is a reference to the historic visit by the Susunan of Surakarta, the most significant representative of Central Javanese royalty, to the city of Semarang.

Night, dearest Moedertje! Sleep well! Dream about love and good things. With you always in her thoughts is,

your own daughter K.

From everyone here the heartiest greetings to you both.

Goodnight.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri (from Roekmini)[80]

22 June 1903

Dearest Moedertje,

Perhaps you might find it very ungrateful of us but I am here to ask you something with regard to our petition.

Please do not get a shock Moedertje, but we suspect trouble is brewing for us both and when the decisive moment for that arrives, only our independence can save us and this can only be provided by a positive response to our petition. We would then no longer be financially dependent either and this would be an especially good weapon for us. Would you now ask Mijnheer on our behalf if His Exc. could not arrange that some haste is made on this matter.[81]

We realize that we are asking far too much but we would never have done so, dearest, if we did not consider it absolutely necessary. We must, after all, never give in; our work after all must be done, mustn't it, and it is in regard to this that we sense there is a danger that there will be an attempt to obstruct us and we must do everything to ensure our plans are carried out. I am speaking here in riddles but I am not yet able to explain to you what it is about. You will get to hear about it, dearest.

You cannot know how unpleasant it is for me to be so secretive towards you, you who knows everything about us. Would you be prepared to do this for us, Moedertje? You would make us very happy and we would thereby be able to continue living, do you understand?

Oh, to discover that everything is almost as far away as ever when we thought we would be able to achieve it, to find again that something else has

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80 Letters by Kartini's sisters to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri have been excluded from this collection. However this letter by Roekmini written on behalf of both women has been included here as it is the first intimation of the impending obstruction to their plans, which is not covered by an equivalent letter from Kartini.

81 This is the first intimation that Kartini has become aware that a marriage was being arranged with the intention of preventing the possibility of her pursuing plans for an education in Batavia and, more broadly, her project for the emancipation of women.

intervened. But you yourself must not think about it too much dearest, perhaps the possibility for us to receive a favourable answer is now closer than ever before and this obstacle may then also disappear.

You will no doubt ask why K herself is not writing. Moedertje, the poor thing is ill. She has measles with some smallpox as well, which she developed as a result of catching a cold, which caused her severe fevers and headaches. Now she has to remain in a dark room, is bored to death and suffers much discomfort when both lying and sitting as a result of the smallpox eruptions. If it were not for the eruptions then she would be feeling quite her old self.

Last week we had a student from the second class of the pol. school[82] staying with us who was taking a trip to visit his Pa and Ma perhaps during the holidays. Naturally I immediately asked after Dop and his girlfriend. He knows them very well and he spoke very warmly about our friend. I felt so good. I showed him Jepara and told him that he, the student, had seen everything which causes this district to make such an impression on so many people. He is the son of the artistic woman who intended to come and about whom I wrote to you recently. Imagine, these people came especially to get to know in detail the wonders of Jepara. Weren't our hearts overjoyed.

Now, Moedertje dear, you will do it, won't you. We thank you very much in advance. Hoping everything will turn out for the best, your daughters kiss you warmly.

K and R

To Dr Nicolaus Adriani

27 June 1903

No doubt by now you will have lost all faith in us, waiting in vain for letters from us. Forgive me, dear kind Uncle. Sister has no doubt told you that in February and March I was very ill and after that my time was taken up with studying. I had to set aside much of the work that is dear to me. I have made a very bad fist of it, especially with my best friends. I could not just send them a brief note. Now I see how foolish I had been: a short note would at least have been better than nothing.

On the holiday I did not want to take time off; on the contrary I wanted to work even harder. There was still so much I had to learn. But Life itself forced me to take a holiday, naturally in a most unpleasant manner. Today is the first

[82] This is appears to be a reference to the colonial civil service training school in Delft.

day I have been out of bed after two weeks. I had almost everything: I caught a cold, had fever, migraine, stomachache and worst of all, measles and chicken pox. It was rather serious. My parents and sisters did not leave my bed for a moment; they, the dears, looked after me and nursed me wonderfully. Sister Roekmini was an angel to me. Oh, you don't know how dear that child is to me and it is as though each day she grows closer to my heart. She always declares that I am better than her but that's not true. She is much more than me, you will also be convinced of that I think.

Recently we received a long letter from Mevrouw van Kol who made us so very happy by informing us that you had written to her about us.[83] In that we can see your affection and firm friendship for us. My hearty thanks for that, dear, kind friend. Now you are reassured, aren't you, that we will stay in the Indies. We were asked to send you Mevrouw van Kol's regards and thanks. She is very busy, when she has more time she will write to you. Now we had better reply to you on her behalf.

In principle, she is in agreement with you about the idea of us going to Holland. That's true: Mevrouw van Kol has never tried to make Holland out to be more than it is, on the contrary, from the very beginning she has directed our attention to the many aggravations, difficulties, disappointments and causes for grief that would await us in Holland but as it was our wish to go there she did whatever she personally could to make our great hopes possible. Remarkably, it is precisely she who had done everything to enable us to go to Holland, who has so gently and lovingly given us her opinion on our change of mind.

Life has taught us a lot over these past months. It has taught us to distinguish real friendship from false. It needs not be said that this lesson has been accompanied by much pain and heartbreak. We owe Nellie an inestimable debt of gratitude. She has taught us to judge others gently. Pray for us. We keep our eyes directed on Him. His will be done!

My desire to write to you is so great that I am scribbling this note to you in pencil while lying on the daybed. I hope this finds you and your dear wife well. Receive a warm greeting from my sister and a warm hand from me.

Kartini

Ps: We have still not received a reply, we are impatiently looking forward to this.

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[83] Adriani had written to Mev. van Kol in December 1902 to express his reservations about Kartini going to the Netherlands. See the general introduction to this volume.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

4 July 1903

My dearest, my own Moedertje,

Thank you very much for your beautiful and so very welcome present! I have longed for a poetry album for so long in which to write down wise sayings. Mine is in Holland and I do not seem to be able to get it back. And now I have one, and from you who is so close to my heart.

A book from my beloved in which to record beautiful, noble, uplifting thoughts! I kissed it again and again when I knew it was for me, at that moment I saw not a book but my beloved's hand that had given it to me. I was still in the early days of my recovery at the time, I tired very easily. And so I slept with my treasure in my arms, close to my heart, in pure happiness, and I dreamt that my dear Moedertje was with me, standing guard over me and protecting me.

Moeske, we both long for a kiss from you, a real warm handshake from your husband. For us it would be a refreshment, a comfort, an encouragement. We have already struggled and suffered so much. We thought that it would be enough that because of all that suffering and struggle we had earned the right to be the brides of our beloved people! The fulfilment of our most dear wish already seemed to be so close and now, suddenly, we are again so far away from it.

Moedertje, oh Moedertje!… Silence, do not complain! Do not sigh! Do not weep! I want to pray, only to pray forever that, whatever the future may bring us, we may ever remain what we were; cheerful, trusting, and believing! So often I have urged others: 'Do not despair, do not curse life.' Glory arises out of suffering. Nothing happens which is contrary to Love. The curse of yesterday becomes the blessing of tomorrow.

'Tribulation is a heavenly education!' Whoever is able to say this with all his heart must also be able to practice it in real life. Now it is my turn to apply in practice the theories that I have announced.

Let me tell you first that I have recovered, although I am still lying lazily on the daybed. I have had everything and in heavy doses too. My face is very disfigured but do not grieve for that. I myself do not. No doubt it may be for my own good, why otherwise would God have given this to me?

The sisters want me to pass on to you their thanks for your beautiful presents, as does Mama who is very pleased with the fine tea tray. Our children will write to you themselves as soon as they can, they have both also been ill.

Your letters arrived yesterday. I thank you very much for them my dearest. I read them with great sadness – were I a child I would have cried loudly. Now

we can smile but what a smile, oh Moeske, besides which weeping would be joyful.

Roekmini will write you everything, for me it has been forbidden. Our Gethsemane approaches. Moeder, pray for us. Now I do not want to think about anything, not about fighting, suffering, about worry, about trials. It tires my head so and sickens my heart. I want to breathe in the perfume of flowers, to bathe in sunshine. These things also exist to comfort us and are blessings for us.

Thank you for your good wishes. I was so happy when the telegram arrived with good tidings from Holland and I had such a need to share my joy with you both that I immediately telegraphed you convinced that you also would be overjoyed.

One day later the telegram arrived from Mas To that contained his emotional plea to think of him and hope for him in his days of anxiety and tension. He dreaded the examination. He has 3 years but if he can do it in 2 years that would be very good. But Prof Kern insisted that he should take the examination before the long vacation and that he could not refuse. It was a risky gamble – and now our boy has saved 1½ years. We were, however, confident because Prof Kern had written us beforehand that Mas To was one of his best pupils and would have no difficulty passing. And also that Prof de Goeie[84] shared this opinion. In this way Mas To has altogether saved 2½ years. He had lost 4 years and now only has 1½ years left. May it continue this way. The next exam will be easier for him since it will be for Javanese and Malay. He hopes once again to save more time. Mas To is much like you in that he learns languages so easily. In that 1½ years he has mastered 5 very easy (!) languages including Russian. He has worked very hard so that he had very little time to meet Didi. It is a pity. It would have been wonderful had those two become good friends and also if you had both got to know my dear boy later.[85]

And now let me tell you about those things that are going so well at the moment.[86] Moeske, we have begun our wonderful work.[87] Thank your husband

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84 Professor MJ de Goeie was a professor of Arabic.

85 Kartono's academic career continued to be erratic, in part because of indulging in the 'high life' (see the reference to Hilda de Booij's report in the general introduction) but also because his initial course (engineering at the Delft Technische School) did not interest him. Wanting to switch to Leiden University to study oriental languages first required him to qualify in Latin and Greek in which he rapidly succeeded. Kartono was attempting both to redeem his reputation and limit costs.

86 Apart from the very brief mention above, Kartini avoids all mention of the emerging crisis revealed by Roekmini, presumably at the request of her father but also, no doubt, not to allow it to overshadow the small success she has achieved in establishing a small classroom.

87 That is, in the midst of their despondency the sisters have begun the little school.

for his advice to begin immediately even without a qualification. Oh, imagine, Moeske dearest, our little school already numbers 7 young pupils and there are constantly more applications. Wonderful, heavenly! We had not dared to hope that it could become so popular. The children think it is wonderful and the parents are overjoyed.

Our first pupil is the daughter of the most cultivated official in the district. W had some discussions with the mother explaining some aspects to her and the result was that the parents sent us their daughter. But the sister, a little tot of less than 5 years of age did not want to stay home alone, she insisted on coming as well! Oh, it can barely look over the table! If I don't stand her on a footstool I take her on my lap. The little thing insisted on joining in. After these two came the daughters of the Collector and a daughter of the assistant Collector. The day before yesterday the Jaksa from Karimun Jawa also brought a daughter here to be taught. Just imagine Moeske: they are sending their daughters out of the house and boarding them here with family!

We are so grateful, so grateful! The parents are so happy with our plans that there are some amongst them who wanted to hand their daughters over to us entirely but at the moment we do not want to accept this – later gladly. Today the daughter of Hassim[88] also came to lessons. Yesterday a young mother came to me and said she regretted terribly that she lived so far away from us, she herself would like to learn from us. Since that was not possible she would like to obtain for her daughter what she herself has to go without. And, imagine, her daughter is not even a year old. As soon as she turns 6 she will send her to us, wherever we might be, she was so insistent that we take her child.

The children come here 4 X per week from 8–12:30. They learn to write, read and sew and cook. We do not teach according to a method but as we think the little Javanese prefer to be taught.

Oh, Moeske, you should both come and see this little group, it would give you such joy! They are always dressed so neatly, they look so sweet and so fresh and innocent. And how simple they make things for us, they are so quick, so receptive. They are so able and so sweet. They became accustomed to us very quickly and already speak quite freely and openly with us. There is one beautiful child amongst them that initially was rather prim, now we have noticed to our great joy that these signs of affectation have disappeared.

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88 Hassim was a cousin. Including Hassim's child, pupils were mainly the children of local officials.

She no longer licks her lips and also no longer plays with her beautiful eyes but is totally engrossed in her work. So, that affectation grew out of idleness. And how nicely they get on together. Amongst themselves they speak high Javanese but it is not affected.

Today a member of the household has a birthday and we wanted to give the children a treat but in a special way. This morning it should have been a handwriting day but we turned it into a cooking day. How those quick, agile little fingers worked. One made small scones, one made pancakes, another made custard – the children worked so hard their cheeks were on fire. How their little eyes sparkled! And they went home so happily to show their parents what they had made.

You see that is a blessing, a blessing for us! We have begun the work for our little sisters![89] Later Kartinah will take on the sewing and cooking classes and Soematri will take care of the rest. Fortunately at the moment we still have the necessities for the sewing and as long as this stockpile lasts they will get everything free, after that the children whose parents can afford it will have to provide the necessary items themselves. But as regards the other study requirements we have a problem: where can we buy the Dutch and Javanese readers?

Would you please ask Mijnheer, Moeske? If it continues to progress and the enrolment increases we intend to apply for a subsidy. Do you think that would be permissible? It is not for us but to meet the costs that are entailed. The lesser native officials can afford so little. Officials with a salary of *f*50 can only just support their family and then usually their wives also work, nothing is available for extra expenses. And we ourselves cannot always give the children everything, you can understand that, can't you. As soon as I am allowed to travel we are going to Semarang. I have to be examined by the doctor, the rheumatic headaches must not become a chronic ailment. But at the same time we will buy what we need for our little ones. Here we have not a single crochet hook or slate left.

I did not want to take a holiday in the vacation period and in fact intended to study very hard. However life gave me a vacation. I did not want to stop but life put the brakes on for me and of course in a less than pleasant manner. I long very much for my books, I have not looked at them in weeks!

Oh, it was so terrible to do nothing. When I had the measles and smallpox no light was allowed to shine in the room – and in this way I had to spend

[89] In fact, given her serious illness, arrangements to commence this 'work' must have been undertaken by Roekmini – Kartini begins this letter describing how she is still having to spend her day on the daybed.

several days locked up in the dark and lying down all the time, I could not walk. It was terrible. How I missed the sun, the trees, the sky. Oh, I was grateful and happy when I was once more able to see all those things I loved! But yet, in all that wretchedness there was, nevertheless, reason for gratitude. There at the bedside, in the expressions of anxiety and tender concern, there were clear expressions of great love.

And as it happened, when I was at the worst point in my illness, there were a great many guests, people who had come from a long way away, to see our dear Jepara and to admire its wonderful art. I had intended to make it a great event, to introduce all those interested to all the treasures that are available here. We had a fine collection of craftwork here on display. I was only able to witness the appreciation of the rulers from Borneo – after that I was no longer conscious. One delightful lady, very artistic, in a word an artist, insisted on meeting me in my sick room! I could of course not meet her husband and son who, by the way, knows Doppie very well as he is also a Pol. Stud.[90] The young prince told Roekmini that Doppie is very much liked by his contemporaries. This was good to hear.

My letter to Doppie and Mary to congratulate him on his good exam results lies unfinished in my writing folder. I had to leave it because of the violent headaches. I caught a cold in Semarang during the days that the Sunan [sic] was there on board the Flagship 'Koningin Regentes'.[91] A rainstorm took us by surprise – even though we were wrapped in the raincoat of the gentlemen officers (in which we looked quite ridiculous) it still must have affected me. And how nice it was of the divisional commander to steam close by Jepara on their way to Ampenan[92] in order to send us a friendly greeting – so the Colonel wrote me.

I am supposed to be quite a coquette[93] – what a wonderful opportunity it was for me then to play that idle game there on board. Whoever may have been flirting, it certainly was not your daughter. I chose the most desirable spot from which one had a beautiful view of the coast and the proud blue mountains and remained sitting there with the commanders. I <u>enjoyed</u> it and later I was utterly delighted by the wonderful searchlights. Colonel van Woereden was very nice to us. We were there on his invitation. He gave me a nice souvenir, a fine photograph of the ship.

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90 That is, he was also enrolled in the course for training colonial civil servants in the Netherlands.

91 This refers to the historic journey of the Susunan of Surakarta to the city of Semarang.

92 Ampenan was the main port of Lombok.

93 Accounts of her behaviour with Resident Sijthoff do seem to suggest this.

We met the Sunan, the Ratu, the princes and the princesses at the home of the Resident – all fine, pretty faces and a blinding array of diamonds! We did not go to the reception, at least not while the aristocracy was there. Father did not want to nor did we ourselves. The Resident was, of course, of another opinion but nevertheless respected our wishes. Yet, when the aristocrats had left we had to appear – whether we wanted to or not. Well, the Resident had done us a favour by allowing us to be spectators of the official reception so that we were prepared to give him that pleasure. Oh goodness, you should have seen it. Uncle refused to look at us, nor would his nephew. How furious they looked. This was the first time we were together with them in important company. The Resident was very pleased with himself. This is what he so very much wanted: to see the freaks cavorting in his salon! We met a lot of people whose names of course we have forgotten.

To our great relief we heard no banalities that evening, that dreadful, awful, cowardly sweet-talking. The people were intelligent and spoke seriously. We were of course quite content, especially when the conversation dealt with our land, our people and our art.

A month ago our uncle was charming to us, after that evening we are once again persona non grata.

I have great plans – when I am better again then I am going to work hard, apart from studying, also writing. Photos in relation to this are already available.

Next week our exhibition[94] will go to Semarang. It is a fine collection. Delightful things are waiting for you, Moeske, but they can first go to Semarang, can't they. Should something happen to them then you will get new ones. Portrait stand, table on 4 legs – both delightful. About your order later – my head is in quite a whirl.

Goodbye dearest. Give our regards to your husband from all of us and for yourself be warmly embraced and kissed by both your daughters

R and K

Forgive my awful writing, I could not do any better, I wrote this lying down on the daybed.

Goodbye, Moeske!

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94 Plans for a Semarang craft exhibition are not previously mentioned. Kartini may have meant the goods were being sent to the port of Semarang for shipment to the exhibition in Surabaya. Presumably the exhibits were those previously viewed at the kabupaten by the visitors Kartini mentions earlier.

To Nicolaus Adriani

5 July 1903

Dear Kind Uncle

How good and kind you always are to us, you are always trying to give us a surprise. Oh and when I think about how we, and especially I, respond to all that kindness. It seems so ungrateful, as though I don't appreciate all that goodness and kindness. Your niece K[95] can be as silent as the grave. Forgiveness, please, dear, kind Uncle.

When yesterday we received your greeting in the form of a reprint from 'Album Kern'[96] my thoughts flew to Sonder[97] and I promised myself to send some words along after them as soon as possible. And I am happy that I can carry out this intention. We thank you sincerely for your kind and very welcome greeting. I read the article with great interest. Oh, if you only knew how a certain someone is admired and appreciated here and we are proud and grateful that we are the nieces of that someone who has such a warm place in our affections, admiration and appreciation.

If every thought I have of you was turned into a deed what a mountain of letters you would have received from here! How warmly Mevrouw van Kol wrote about you and that made us very glad because one of our dearest wishes is that all those that we are very fond of and respect should also have a warm regard for each other.

My dearest, loyal Roekmini is ill at the moment; it is not too serious but nevertheless the watchword is: take care. At the moment she is sleeping peacefully, otherwise I would not be sitting here of course. As soon as I can travel I am going to Semarang to have the doctor check me, the rheumatic headaches must not become chronic.

To set all this nastiness aside for a moment, and to send you some better tidings: Kartono has passed his entrance examination. A day after the happy telegram from Holl. we received a letter from him in which he movingly appealed for friends to think of him, to hope and pray for him in the days of anxiety and tension. He was not looking forward to these exams for which he had only recently begun to prepare but Prof Kern was so insistent that he should sit the exams before the long vacation that he was prepared to take the risk. How happy that dear boy must be now. And how wonderful, that thereby

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95 Kartini refers to herself as niece in relation to Adriani who she refers to as Oom (uncle).

96 This reference could not be traced.

97 This was a village in the hills of the Minahassa, north Sulawesi, and part of the same Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap mission network. Adriani was working on a study of a local language.

he has been able to gain 1 year and inclusive of the State exam, 2 years. He had lost 4 years. I am so thankful that he has been able to redeem such a large portion of those lost years. Pray for and with us that he may continue in this way.

How are you both, Uncle? Do you like it there, in Sonder? Do you ever see the Torajans there?[98] I can imagine that it must severely test you to have to put aside your work for such a long time. We don't like to leave the place where we have left our heart, that is where our future, our life, is.

And now I want to tell you something nice. While waiting for what will be coming, we decided to already make a start. We have opened a little school here at home which already has seven pupils, daughters of native officials. We have just been informed that we will be getting a further three children from outside the district. We had begun with one pupil but this figure quickly rose to 5 and tomorrow there will be 8 attending lessons and soon there will be ten. Oh, and just imagine, the first pupil was the daughter of one of the most important mantri officials in Jepara. We discussed the matter with the child's mother, explained some of the details to her and the result was that one day she entrusted her daughter to us with the full agreement of the mantri father. They in fact were so enamoured with the idea that they had decided they would give the child to us completely, which we don't really want to accept at this stage.

The day before yesterday something happened that really moved us. A mother brought us her little daughter and this mother came all the way from Karimun-Jawa. It almost never happens that native officials send their daughters out of the house. But that child will be boarded with relatives or friends in order to be able to attend our school. They would like to come every day but we can't do that. We still have to study ourselves.

The children learn to read, write etc., and besides that needlework and cooking. We didn't think they would take that up so soon. It is a blessing from God. We cannot express our gratitude other than regarding it all with moist eyes.

It is such a joy each time we see the children. It is such a fresh, innocent group of little ones. They always arrive so neatly dressed and they get on with each other so well. It didn't take them long to become used to us: although they conform to the required forms of etiquette they are still quite open with us, as if no official or social class differences existed. That is what we want to aim for.

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98 The reference is to Pamona people from the Poso mission, then referred to as 'Bare'e speaking Torajans'.

And how easy the children make it for us: they are so quick, so impressionable and so clever and so amenable. We have not once had to punish anyone.

Yesterday was Roekmini's birthday and we wanted to treat the children in a special way. They had to make the treat themselves. Oh, how those little black eyes shone with delight, how those quick and agile little fingers set to work It was a joy to watch them. It made their cheeks glow and we couldn't get enough of looking at their happy faces with those happy, shining eyes. And how proudly they went home to show their parents their first attempt at baking. Not only we, not only the children but also the parents gained pleasure from this.

The children are very eager to come, they do their work with enthusiasm and the parents are delighted. Everything seems to point to the fact that we are merely fulfilling a long-held need. The blessing that comes to us from the father of Love is indeed great. He has honoured us with a beautiful, wonderful task. Oh, that we may be able to meet the expectations, that we will be worthy of the trust that has been placed in us! This is what we have longed for so long, what we had so passionately wished we would be allowed and able to do: to lead pure, young hearts, fresh, undamaged souls, as blank as newly fallen snow, to form their young characters.

Pray for us! May God bless our efforts and our work.

Oh, and it is wonderful that there are others who want to undertake the same work that we are doing! Good fellow workers exist, they have only to be shaken awake. We have tried to get into contact with girls and women who have had a similar education to ourselves but this has not succeeded. Making personal propaganda such as we have done here will perhaps work better.[99] And – there is no better sermon than setting an example, a good model to follow.

A student at the native doctor school, someone whom we did not know, wrote to us to introduce his two nieces and to ask if we would extend our influence over them. He asked if we would write to them. We do so gladly and hope this will have some benefit. That young person himself is a passionate idealist. I also write to another young person, a nice, dear boy, a cousin of ours. How delighted he was when he was allowed to write to me!

We have an incredible advantage over others because of our birth and father's social position. That, as well as other things, makes it easy for us. What we are doing is so new. Young women have never corresponded with

[99] It seems Kartini was unable to establish contact with Dewi Santika in Bandung or Eti Wawu Runtu in the Minahassa but had established a network of male correspondents.

young men before. And we do so now normally, as if this was self-evident. We associate with them as comrades, they regard us as sisters. For them this is so new, so new that we, with such a high position, do not consider it beneath our dignity to associate in a friendly way with people whose social position is far below ours.

This cousin trusts us and sees in us an older sister to whose advice and words he gladly listens. I regularly pray fervently to God that we will never shame this trust and that he will always find in us what he is looking for and needs. It is so good to make the acquaintance of such young, pure, passionate natures. Oh, may life not destroy their pure idealism![100] This trust is something with which our Father above honours us. Hope and pray for us, dear Friend, that we may continue to be worthy.

We are never happier than when we can provide another with moral support. It is strange but we have always felt ourselves to be older than most of those of our age and even older in age than we are. That no doubt is because we have already experienced, considered and wrestled with so much in our short lives.

It does sound very egotistical when we talk about our children and mean our sisters who are not really much younger than we are. But they too regard us more as their mother than as their sisters.[101] Oh, may God grant that we become the sisters and mother of many, very many more.

Our school must appear as little as possible like a school, and we look as little as possible like a schoolmistress; rather it must appear like a large family of which we are the mothers. We will teach them about Love as we understand this by deed and by word. In our childhood our guiding principle was: what you don't want done to you, don't do to others.

Mevrouw van Kol told us a lot about your Jesus, about the apostles and this did us good. What does it matter what belief or race one belongs to, a good soul is a good soul, a noble character is a noble character. God's children can be found in every religious community, in every race.

I have read *Quo Vadis*[102] and I have admired and grown fond of the religious martyrs who, while experiencing great suffering, continued to look up to the

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100 While further detail is lacking, these references suggest that Kartini was communicating with students of the STOVIA whose idealism led to the founding of Budi Utomo. Reference to their 'idealism' can therefore be understood as their similar commitment to the modernization and advancement of Java, the ideals later inscribed by the first proto-nationalist organization, Budi Utomo.

101 The reference is to Kartini's two youngest sisters, Kartinah (b. 1883) and Soematri (b. 1888).

102 Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) *Quo Vadis* (1895).

Highest in gratitude and trust, contributed to sing his praise in beautiful song. I suffered with them and celebrated with them.

Do you know Edna Lyall's *Wij Beiden*![103] It is also wonderful. It is about atheists and Christians, about true Christendom and how it has been terribly twisted as it appears, alas, all too often in the world. It presents the great figure of the atheist Luke Raeburn, and next to him an equally fine, noble figure, Erica Raeburn, who changed from being an active atheist and became a convinced, pious Christian. Father and daughter, who love each other and are totally involved in each other's lives.

We have also read: *De Ziel van een Volk* about Buddhism, which is a wonderful book. Now we would love to read about Judaism. Perhaps the books by Zangwill will provide what we are looking for: *Droom van het Ghetto*.[104]

And now I have to finish. Warm greetings, dear uncle, also from sister Roekmini. Greet your wife heartily on our behalf and receive yourself a warm hand from

Your fond niece
Kartini

To Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

9 July 1903

My dear, kind Friends,

You can imagine how we felt when we received your telegram this morning. The news that we have looked forward to so passionately for so long, often with such pain, the news of our 'freedom', has arrived! – One day too late!

Yesterday a letter was sent and today the addressee received it – a letter in which the Regent of Rembang was promised my hand. I telegraphed you, I did not want to frighten you, I did not know that Father would telegraph you. Now you know the terrible 'joyful' tidings! We know that you are both with us in your thoughts.

That was <u>the baptism</u> of fire that we received this morning. How we now feel, you can imagine. I am not able to write you much, my mind is preoccupied, my brain is confused.

Goodnight dear friends, pray for us
Your Kartini

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103 Ada Ellen Bayly (pseudonym Edna Lyall) (1857–1903), *We Two* (1884). This was based on the life of social reformer Charles Bradlaugh.

104 Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898).

To Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

10 July 1903

Dear Friends,

You will understand that we are making efforts to yet come to Batavia. There is next to no possibility for that but as long as there is still life there is still hope.

There is mention of the Resident requesting a withdrawal of our petition. Is this possible without our permission? It is fortunate that we have not depended on or put our faith in anyone, we do not now have to experience the sudden change of opinion of others who once claimed to be on our side.

We knew this would happen. In the meantime do not be sad any longer, God allows no one to suffer too much! We are very calm. The prayer of our parents seems to have had more force than ours. Their heart's desire has been fulfilled before ours.[105]

Last year, when it was foretold that this would happen to me by both a Native and an extremely cultivated European, I had laughed loudly about it.

When my sister has recovered, we are going to Semarang; for me it is certainly time, the nights are so long, my eyes are giving me such pain. Please do not think we are constantly bathed in tears, we certainly are not. Come what may, for you both, are we still what we were? We are bound together. Do you remember Kardinah's struggle?

I am still not able to write very much.

Night dear friends, do not worry about us, but pray for my sister and your

K.

To Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

14 July 1903

Confidential

My dear, kind friends,

My heart tells me that you are anxiously waiting for a letter from me. I have waited with my writing until my spirit felt calmer. You had best hear the sad news directly, the sooner the better.

We have been defeated. That which had caused the fall of my sister, has also made me powerless. The doctor's advice continues to be in force: strong

[105] Kartini had reported in June her awareness of the impending events. It coincided with the establishment of her classroom, which may have been agreed to by way of a consolation. Writing about her classroom enabled her to block out thoughts of this.

emotion must be avoided. We ourselves know this only too well. I have fought, wrestled, suffered – and I cannot be the cause of my father's fate and thereby bring grief to everyone whom I love.[106] Better that I deal the mortal blow to my own heart than be the cause of the suffering of all those who are dear to me. I do not have to tell you what it has cost me to act against my deepest feelings, my most sacred principles.

I hope my Parents will not reap bitter fruit from the fulfilment of their dearest wish. They are also acting from pure motives, they honestly mean to promote my happiness. They cannot reason differently than in the spirit of the times in which they had grown up. It is so difficult to put oneself in another's position, one directly opposite to that of one's own. If I have acted incorrectly, I pray that God will forgive me. If they did wrong, God have pity on them; we both acted in good faith.

Do you know the nature of my wonderful happiness, my humiliation, my shame? I am the fiancée of the Regent of Rembang, a widower with 6 children and 3 wives. More I will not have to tell you, will I? You know me sufficiently well. May it be a comfort to you that, for many reasons, I have respect for the man at whose side fate appears to want to place me.

He had no mother to teach him to honour her sex. He does not know that what he did was against the highest commandment: Love! The Raden Ayu had no children, it is probable that she had given him those women, that is not unusual.

My crown has fallen from my head. My golden illusions of purity and chastity lie shattered in the dust. It was my pride, my glory, that I was a pure, proud girl loved by my Moedertje as if I were her own child. Now I am nothing more than all the rest, I am like thousands of others who I had wanted to help but whose number I have now merely come to increase.

O God, my God have pity on me! Give me the strength to carry my cross. Can I still be your daughter, without a crown, without golden illusions? O God, must this really happen? Is this Your will? Oh, if it was a temptation, oh pity me, pity me!

It is thanks to Nellie van Kol that we have not committed some act of desperation. She helped us find the God of Love and in Him we find strength and comfort. Our firm belief in His Love has kept us going and brought peace to our terribly shaken soul. He sees the beginning and the end, we people see merely the process.

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[106] Kartini reminds the Abendanons of how Kardinah agreed to the marriage arrangement in order to save her father, seriously ill at the time, from further anxiety.

Everything occurred at once, my illness, the request, the illness of my sisters, Roekmini and Mama. I was very ill when the representative of the Regent of Rembang arrived with his letter. When I suspected danger, I had R write to you immediately, the Government decision was our only chance of rescue.[107]

It came – and it was too late! It was on the same day that the Regent received my parents' answer. The previous day I had remained calm, cold and unemotional, unmoved, while the others were prey to great emotion. But when the telegram arrived it was the end of my self-control – I received it in the middle of my lesson, I left the children, I could not continue teaching.

Shall we pass over those days of suffering, of desperation and struggle? Enough, enough, we have undergone baptism by fire. I established my conditions: I am to be permitted to continue studying, take the exam, open the school and beyond that, do all the work that I love and have been doing here. My parents find my request reasonable and natural.

And then I asked to be allowed to continue for one more year my dream of freedom and self-development, to still be allowed to go to Batavia to participate in one year of a course and to try to complete it in that one year. They had no objection to that but the R. of R. had to approve. That was then agreed to and that is why I hoped that he would come soon.[108]

But God ordained otherwise. Other representatives arrived. On Saturday night, on the 11th and on Sunday morning I was given a letter to read which made my hair stand on end. Oh God! How much a woman has to endure!

It was a proposal of marriage – what a tone, my God! That man already half regarded me as his property. I became so anxious and so frightened, so frightened that I was shivering and shaking. His family is well-known, I knew that my parents would never give me to him. He would be in a position to pursue us if he had heard that we were in Batavia and could make it very difficult for us there. If it were only that! I have to say this: in these kinds of things I do <u>not</u> trust most of my countrymen. You may laugh about it perhaps, but we have seen this before, guna-guna is no fiction. I had heard recently that this man had sought recourse to this. And those strangers together with one of their servants rummaged through our house, as it were, to find us. Father locked us into our room. It still makes me shudder when I think of it. Mama also became frightened.

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107 Roekmini's letter of 22 June.

108 The hope she might still be able to come to Batavia, expressed in the previous letter, was on the assumption that the Regent of Rembang would agree to a postponement of the wedding – a long engagement. The nature of the second proposal made this impossible.

And slowly it entered our consciousness that at this time it is still not possible for a young Native girl to be independent, to work independently, in public. A great danger besets her from the direction of men. For a Javanese man, no woman is too ugly, that we now know.

We had never considered that danger simply because we do not think about vile, dirty things. We had not considered marriage, and believed in all seriousness that others thought the same in regard to us. We had spread enough rumours about ourselves to have frightened everyone away from us. As a general rule our men will have nothing to do with such difficult women as us, so talked about, so maligned and ridiculed. We had considered all possibilities, opposition, contempt, etc., but never this danger. When the Eastern person is imprisoned by passion then he will brook no opposition.

In our traditional clothing we, as independent young girls, would not be safe anywhere in public. This thought is constantly with me. Roekmini has also come to the same conclusion. Now I suddenly remember that the daughters of the Regent of Ciamis, when they were still going to school in Batavia, had not always worn European clothes. However it had become so difficult for them that they put aside their national dress and wore European clothes. Only if we were in Europe would we be completely free.

If you knew with what indescribable pain I am writing you this then you will forgive us the disappointment and perhaps the sorrow we are causing you: we are renouncing our resolution to study in Batavia. With all my heart I thank you for everything that you have done for us with love and for love. Do not think we do this lightly. We have weighed and pondered, struggled and suffered. I would wish no one the suffering that we have experienced these last days.

You will find me very, very altered when you see me again. I sincerely hope and pray that this will still happen. Heer v. Kol saw the lines on my palm and exclaimed: 'What pronounced lines, what deep, passionate feelings.' And then: 'What a strange lifeline you have, you will be thwarted in your deepest feelings, but yet all will be for the best.' May we hope that this last prediction will also come true.

Do not think we are planning to give up the great project, we will achieve it via some other means. For the time being we will content ourselves with our little school. Our wardrobe for Batavia lies ready: a feeling of hopelessness comes over me when I look at it. Who could have foretold this? We were too confident! No, I do not want to think of it any more, instead bravely take up my life again as it now lies stretched out before me.

I am going to study here at home and study under the supervision of Heer Both, as I have been since February. This was my secret, my surprise for you. You must not feel ashamed about your little protégée; she must be thoroughly prepared. It is only a pity that he cannot teach me in all subjects, but perhaps Heer Paulen will be able to make up what is lacking.[109]

And now Moedertje, to tell you something about your prospective 'son-in-law'. Do not let that word frighten you. You cannot speak Dutch with him, Moeske, even though he has been to Holland.[110] If I have to believe what I have heard about him, as a person he is a coeur d'or and as an official he has a very fine reputation. He has already earned his spurs in those areas where I have yet to begin: that is, he has done much for his people. Like Oetoyo,[111] he is a son of a Patih and has achieved what he has by hard work and not through intrigue.

Father has had a lot to do with him and he with Father. I also know that he has always been very interested in us and has been concerned as to how everything would work out in the end. That was when his wife was still alive. We have never in our lives seen each other but we have heard a lot of each other. He appreciates in us our striving, values our spiritual selves.

Let all this be a comfort to you as it is to me.

He is not a non-entity but a real personality. Perhaps in many more ways, I do not know, but in at least one-way he is definitely our superior: in language! That is just marvellous. His lettters are beautiful, poetic pieces, one feels they come from the heart.

Over there somewhere is a letter of his in which he declares his happiness and gratitude. He gives thanks and prays, prays, prays …

I read it with a deep sorrow, if he only knew how here I also prayed, prayed, constantly prayed, for strength! The night after he received Father's letter he announced his engagement to the Native officials in his district. The carrier of the good news was feted as if he were the bridegroom himself. And while toasts were being drunk to our health and happiness, the walls of our room

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109 Unable to go to Batavia, Kartini was putting on a brave face continuing with studies that were going to prepare her for the initial teacher qualifying examination. In any event she was assured of being allowed to establish a school in Rembang.

110 Her future husband had been to the Netherlands and had attended the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina in 1898 as a representative of her Javanese subjects.

111 Raden Mas Koesoemo Oetoyo was an example of a new generation of regent, appointed on the basis of their educational qualifications rather than simply inheriting the position on the basis of primogeniture. He succeeded Kartini's father as Regent of Jepara. He became well known for his educational experiments that became the model of what later became the government-sponsored village elementary school system introduced in 1907.

were silent witnesses to an eruption of grief, of young hearts that were parting from their great illusions. Within those walls, grief-stricken souls prayed to the invisible Father for strength, strength!

Here, too, the engagement has now been made public.[112] Pray, pray to eternity!

The children are still very young, 5 little tots and a boy of about 12. Everything I can do I will – to ensure that the 2 girls will not suffer as we both did and that their brothers will for their mother's sake not make any woman suffer.

The difference in age is great, about 17 or 16 years.

Our [school] children are very happy that their sister is getting married. Poor dears, they have not the faintest idea what their happiness will cost their sister.

We are going to Semarang on the 17th. Do not tell Annie anything – tell her I am extremely happy.

And when Didi arrives, tell him as much of my good fortune as you think proper.

When the union is to be finalized we do not yet know, he will of course want it to take place as soon as possible. I surprise myself how calmly I can write all this down as if it were nothing. Do you have something for sleeplessness? I cannot keep going this way for much longer.

And now, goodnight my dear, sweet love. Pray for me.

Your devoted
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri (Letter from Roekmini)[113]

15 July 1903

Dear, kind Moedertje,

Since Kartini wrote to you yesterday, I can no longer contain my urge to write to you again. I had wanted to for a long time but I have been constantly prevented as I became ill and then got smallpox. For a long time, for the entire duration of the illness, I had to wait while so many things demanded that I come to you; you can imagine what I went through, being forced to lie

112 As on other significant occasions, Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri is made aware of an important development after the event.

113 This letter by Roekmini contains significant further detail regarding the marriage arrangements and was very likely written at Kartini's behest.

still and in a darkened room at that, in which thoughts had even greater free reign.

Now I only wanted to say, do not be so sad any more, dear Moedertje, and nor should Mijnheer. Kartini has told you everything. And I shall not repeat what we have had to put up with in the last days – what would be the sense of it? After all, don't we want to remain strong? But now we have received God's blessing: it must be that, because we have found peace after the battle. We have been granted the strength to continue in this life even if along a totally different road than before.

Yes, I can assure you, dearest, we still have a great deal of courage to live and if we have that, we are not, after all, lost, are we? I wish you could convince yourself that that is the case; it is certainly not said in order to throw sand in your eyes, to deceive you into thinking that everything is all right while in fact we face the opposite, but it is the complete truth when I say this. The cross that our darling must carry is heavy, and I also feel its burden but who knows, who knows what good might flow from it for her and me. Both of us, despite the heavy blow, continue to search unceasingly for the 'Light' and I think we have been able to find 'It'.

You are aware of the conditions, aren't you, drawn up by Tini and regarded as natural and reasonable by our Parents? Well, it can still be beautiful, her life. She can still continue to work for 'the People' and perhaps she may now be able to do more good because the people will naturally regard her as the one for whom they, in the first instance, must set aside a place in their hearts – as the wife of the one who is their 'Father'. May this be a comfort to us, dearest, since she is able to retain her Ideal; if she suffers, it is for her 'love' and that brings glory.[114]

There is so much, so much that we have had to bury, but now that we still have a life before us we now want to find our comfort there. I know how you both, whom we have included in this beautiful dream, are affected, but we pray to you that you will look at it as we do, to once more live together with us, dearest. Forgive us and assuage the suffering that we have unintentionally caused you. It will once more make us happy to know that our dear friends, who are at the same time our Parents, are at peace again. Forgive our Parents; you can place them in the category of 'people who want nothing more than the happiness of their children'. They acted in good faith. Also with us two, we had to pray and pray, why, for what, we ourselves did not rightly know but we

[114] This argument had been previously used by Kartini to justify the decision not to go to the Netherlands.

felt we had to for everything we received… It was a rich piece of life for us in all its terrible forms. May it in the end be to our good!

Now I also will not be coming to you. My Parents think that for me on my own there are even greater difficulties. And what would it be like for me so completely without Kartini? If I had considered a separate existence, as we had thought would be the case with K. in L[aan] de Riema and me in Tjikim,[115] would be so terrible, how then would it be when I know she would not be near me at all? Even here at home it will weigh heavily on me, this life without her. We had always been so close.

And here I have our little school about which you no doubt know a great deal. I will live for that, as much as I am able. I am very fond of the children and they continue so wonderfully to do their best that there is always a great pleasure in teaching them. Only, it is a great pity that I will not obtain that medical and first-aid knowledge. It would be wonderful to possess it. But perhaps I will still be able to learn this.

You know what held us back from going to Batavia in the end, Moedertje, it is no small matter. We continue to get shivers over our bodies if we but read the letter. It is such a crude affair and given that the man will have had his pride bruised, he will never be able to forgive us, and that is our fear! Oh, then how badly were we mistaken in thinking to be completely free through what we revealed of ourselves. We thought we had engendered a distaste in that respect in the people. But alas! We so hope that that person will leave it at this and not trouble us any further.

But there is also a source of comfort for us, dearest. My prospective brother-in-law is a somebody: he is no ordinary person. His special qualities however are to be found in nothing more than in his heart, which must be made of gold. He also respects quality of intellect: despite his lack of knowledge of European languages, it had been his wish to have no other wife than one who was completely at ease and sparkled in its use; who moved in modern circles, because he very much wanted his children to become what society here in Java now demands.

As the Bearer of the Future of his children he chose our Tini. He must have been considering the idea for a long time but never really had the courage to take it that far until that particular day. We learned all this from others because his proposal was a great surprise to us. You see dearest, if we can believe everything we have heard about him then we can hope that everything will go well. Mijnheer Gonggrijp knows him very well. He said of him that he

[115] Tjikim was a well-known hospital. Kartini may have planned to stay at the large van Motman mansion on Laan de Reima (Reimer).

was someone whom you could respect. 'I have such a healthy respect for him, he is extremely pinter!' His people are very fond of him and when he announced his engagement they apparently greeted it with great enthusiasm. He himself is so happy, that I can imagine! The official who brought him Father's letter that contained his approval was so warmly welcomed and entertained that he became confused.

And what of his language! He is indeed a poet, his letters are poetry, they reveal a soul of pure goodness. What a contrast with that other. Leaving aside everything else we are sometimes able to simply enjoy it as literature. I hope, I pray fervently, that sister's sacrifice will not be in vain.

Now you know everything dearest, but only you of all our friends know the real course of events. Only to you we reveal what we are – towards others, our acquaintances, we want to maintain appearances, for them we want to appear totally happy. No one else needs to look into our hearts, only to you is this entrusted. Will you now help us to play this role well Moedertje? If people ask you about us, smile and tell them a story. After all, not everything is lost, is it?

After this letter to you I want to write to Annie whom I still owe a long letter and to her we want to write a letter full of enthusiasm, for her we plan to be the 'lucky ones'. Will you assist us in this, dearest, and when she speaks to you about this also give the appearance that you share in our happiness. We ask a lot from you but after all you are like Parents, and we hope that you will continue to value such confidence.

Oh, we thank God for such support as that from you and Nellie v. Kol. What would our lives be otherwise.

We received the official decisions, may we keep them, or what should we do? How we would love to keep them as a relic, a reminder of our beautiful past. We already have the telegram; that belongs to us.

Well, dearest Moedertje, may our letter bring peace to you both as well as faith in us regarding the rest of our lives. If you do have that, write and tell us, it would make us so happy.

The engagement has been public for 4 days, the people are happy, they have prayed for God's blessing for the couple. May the prayer, which is also mine, be heard. How will Kartono receive it, poor boy. It will be such a terrible contrast to all the good fortune he has received. Poor, poor boy. And Didi. Oh, why have you only had suffering, suffering, suffering from us?

We so long for a real embrace at this moment from our friends, a kiss, and a few words given in person. Our head longs to nuzzle against the shoulder of our dearest one.

Well Moedertje dear, may you write to us soon. To you and Mijnheer we send much love and a warm hand from your devoted daughters.

Bye, we embrace you warmly. K. is beginning to sleep better.

Roekmini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

24 July 1903

My dearest, sweetest Moedertje,

I sometimes feel as though you are the only Moeder I have ever had. Oh, how outrageously ungrateful of me towards the two dear, noble women who love me with their whole hearts and whose child I am.

With great sorrow I heard how extremely unwell you have been. What are you suffering from, dearest? Have you now recovered? You must not become ill again, for my sake. I pray you do not take my circumstances too much to heart. Do not make it more difficult for me than it already is. Support me, give me strength by happily accepting the cross which God has laid on your child. 'Those whom one loves, one chastises.'

Have I not written you what my experience has been: it is just they who feel a sense of life, who want to do so much for others, who have the greatest burdens to bear, who suffer most. For those people, life can be extremely hard. God give me strength to drain this cup to the very last drop! Think no more of our poor hearts, our wounded souls, think only that what has happened, and what has yet to happen, must be for a good purpose, as yet imperceptible to us short-sighted human beings.

Think not of our suffering, learn as we do to bear it with good cheer. You need not say it, I know you shared that baptism of fire with us. Thank you, dearest, for your love and support. What I often think of with great sorrow are those three women, the mothers of his children. Poor, poor souls, how they must have felt when he, joyously happy, announced his engagement at that celebration. I prayed to God for forgiveness, forgiveness for him, and forgiveness for me. Oh, may that terrible suffering not be avenged on his poor, innocent children! I now reckon it as one of my holiest tasks in life to ensure with all my powers that his daughters will never know that suffering which we suffer.

I went to Semarang last week, to be examined by the doctor. I am suffering from a combination of malaria and nervousness. Today I was again very unwell, diarrhoea, now I feel a little better. In Semarang we visited Mev. Prins, the lady who came to visit us when we were so very ill. She has a lovely voice and

plays piano beautifully. That evening she sang and played for us. A niece of hers asked her to sing 'young love'[116] for me. Mev. Prins hesitated, looked at me, I had not told her anything but a refined woman can understand the feelings of another without words being exchanged. The niece insisted, I calmly returned the gaze of the singer, she was not going to hear anything from me. And then she sang that anthem…

I have learned self-control. When she kissed me goodnight, I closed my eyes, I did not see her – you, Moedertje, were the only one I saw! Moeske, hold me to your heart once more, look into my eyes again before the great sea of life separates us forever. That is my wish, my dearest, deepest, most passionate wish.

Do you believe in a Superior Being? Just consider my life, how nicely organized everything has been: I was severely ill, the Regent of Rembang came, then the Government resolution and after that the other proposal. No human being could have thought it out so well. You are the only one who knows everything, tell those who may be interested in some fairy tale would you please, Moeske? Let the people despise me and think that it was my doing that I am getting married. There is a God who knows me, a Father who will judge me mercifully, that is sufficient for me.

Now I have a very important request to make of you, actually it is to Mijnheer. Would you pass it on to His Excellency? We have a great interest in a young person and would very much like to see him succeed. The name of this young person is Salim, he is a Sumatran, from Riouw, who this year completed his final exams at the H.B.S. and is No.1 of the 3 H.B.Ss. That boy would dearly love to go to Holland to study to become a doctor, but unfortunately he is not financially able.[117] His father receives a salary of only *f*150. If necessary he would be prepared to serve as a sailor, as long as he can get to H. Ask Hasim about him, he knows him and has heard him speak at the STOVIA. He is a fine stout-hearted chap, who deserves to be assisted.

When we heard of him and of his ambitions, a strong desire arose in us to do what we could to make it easier for him. We thought of the Government decision of 7 July 1903, that resolution which we had so desperately awaited, and received in sorrow. Should the fruit of the labour of noble friends, of our hopes and prayers and desires be lost, and unused? The Government offered us both *f*4800 for the completion of our training – could that not

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116 Perhaps a reference to a currently popular song.

117 This is a reference to Agus Salim, later a protégé of Snouck Hurgronje, who was appointed to the Dutch consulate in Jeddah to monitor Islamic pilgrims from the East Indies. In the 1920s he became president of a reformed Sarekat Islam.

be transferred to another who may deserve to be helped even more than us, and certainly no less? It would be wonderful if the Government would be prepared to pay for his entire education, which would amount to about *f*8000 – if that were not possible then we would be grateful if Salim could receive the *f*4800 set aside for us. For the remaining amount we would seek the help of others. May we write to the Queen about Salim? – not a petition but a private letter?

Oh, let him taste the joy that our soul has yearned for years and that has been denied us. Make us happy by making another happy, one who is inspired by the same desires, feelings and aspirations as we are. We know what it is to feel life within us, to carry a burning desire in our breast. Oh do not allow that beautiful young life, that fresh energy to be lost! This must in the best sense be exploited for the benefit of the people that so desperately needs such energy.

Heer van Kol wrote that the Minister [of Colonies] had written to the G.G. on his own initiative to request he give a favourable decision on our petition regarding our education in Holland. Is the case of Salim not also unique? Oetoyo was the first Javanese who gained the top position in the final H.B.S. exam.[118] Between him and Salim there is at least a 12 year gap. What a great deal Salim would be able to do for his people as a doctor! That is in fact Salim's dream: to work for his people!

It is a very strange request we are making, we know this, but oh, if only it could be granted Moeske, then all those months, years of struggle would not need to be have been wasted, useless. Let us savour the rare privilege in our lifetime to see the fruits of our suffering and our struggle which would be: the realization of Salim's dream.

May God hear our prayer! Should we write to the Queen, Moedertje? That fine young life, that fresh energy must not be wasted! I know of an excellent guardian for Salim, that of my brother. He is such a fine person, and is so fond of our people. He would no doubt take pity on Salim. We will also write to Holland about him. Do you know that Abdul Rivai, the former Doctor-Jawa, now a medical student in Amsterdam was financially supported by the former Minister [of Colonies] Cremer?[119] We will turn to the people who had offered to give us a helping hand.

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118 Raden Mas Koeseomo Oetoyo, later Regent of Jepara and president of Budi Utomo. In 1918 he became a key member of the Volksraad. See above, Kartini to the Abendanons, 14 July 1903.

119 Abdul Rivai was active in establishing and writing for a number of Malay language newspapers in the Netherlands at this time and possibly the first significant advocate of

Salim himself knows nothing of all this, he does not even know that we exist. He only knows that with heart and soul he longs to complete his studies, so that he can later work for his people, and that he is not able to do this because he has no money.

We live, hope and pray for Salim.

I do not have the heart to write to my brother about us, he will be heartbroken when he hears. Poor, poor boy! I have yet to write all the friends in Holland. They have barely recovered from their astonishment and disappointment that we are not coming to Holl., and now they are again confronted by a dramatic surprising fact. They can all regard me as being characterless, as long as they do not suspect the truth. Oh, I have not yet learnt to play the comedian properly. Life will no doubt teach me. What have we not learnt, experienced and discovered in this short time.

Do you understand now why we had wanted to go to Holl.? Only Holl. would have made us totally free. It has been a fair contest, we have lost.[120] We had seriously thought ourselves to be completely free, that we had frightened everyone away by the way we had presented ourselves. There are no Javanese girls who have been so talked about, ridiculed, despised, judged as we have been.[121]

I still cannot understand what in God's name the Regent of Rembang could expect from us. He has heard enough about me to know what I am like. When he comes here he will have to hear all this again and in detail. He will have to be thoroughly informed of all my faults, whims and caprices so that he knows beforehand what he is taking on. That is also one of my conditions. At first my plan had been to go to Batavia with his two daughters for a year, but then that other one had intervened. I would have had an entire entourage with me had I gone.

I have requested to be spared all that bridal nonsense, also I do not want to give the traditional foot kiss, that would be the limit! I am keeping him to his word – he wanted an equal, a partner. Yes, there is so much, so much to be done. The ladies of Rembang have already enquired if I … played dice! This must be the curse of our society. How disappointed they will be when they hear that I want to have nothing to do with it.

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an Indonesian nationalism. Kartini demonstrates here her awareness of (and possibly contact with) the emerging wave of modern thinking amongst her generation of Western educated Indonesians.

120 This is an important reminder that it was Abendanon who finally convinced Kartini not to go to the Netherlands.

121 The degree of publicity that Kartini attracted appears to be no exaggeration and indicates how significant – and perhaps influential – this brief episode at the beginning of the century was in highlighting these modern aspirations by a Javanese woman.

Please present my excuses to Oost en West for not having replied to their letters, would you Moeske? Tell them we have all been ill. I will very soon send you your woodcarving, I wanted to pack it this morning but became unwell. I will wait a few days before doing it, by then your tortoiseshell boxes will also be ready and will be added to it. Didi has been granted an extension of his leave – there is nothing wrong with him, is there?

Do get better soon, Moeske. Do you know that the Native women are asking for a magazine? We are unable to provide this, it would be too much for us. Now we want to get someone else to do this, we will tell you about it later.[122]

Give Mijnheer hearty greetings from us all. 'Night dearest, sleep well, you are kissed lovingly by your own daughter,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Ovink-Soer

No date (July 1903)[123]

How unpleasant that the indiscrete press has pre-empted me. I had wanted to tell you myself of my most recent decision, or you may have missed the newspaper report concerning me. I hope so.

You know that I had planned to go to Batavia to study there for my assistant teacher qualification. But now my path will not lead westward but it will now go East where I will come to stand beside an educated man sympathetic to Western culture, in order to realize my dreams for our people, directly taking the shortest way. How surprised you will be dearest: Kartini, engaged, soon to be married! It must be as if you are hearing a fable, isn't it? Oh, who of us here below can claim to lead a life that is completely determined by himself? Suddenly another life has crossed mine, a struggle … and my life path goes off in another direction than that which I had planned for myself. This is not an impulsive decision, I have thought and pondered this long and hard before making my decision. If in this way I can reach my goal I am aiming at better and with greater certainty, why should I not take this path?

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122 A women's periodical was established by the wife of Tirto Adhisurjo some years later. There is no indication that Kartini had been in contact with this influential pioneer journalist.

123 This letter extract was included in Ovink-Soer, 'In Memoriam Raden Ayu Djojo Adiningrat', *De Hollandsche Lelie*, 1904, 343–44 and repeated in Ovink-Soer's 'Persoonlijke Herinneringen aan Raden Adjeng Kartini', *Vrije Arbeid*, May 1925, 26–29. It was reproduced in Allard (1976), 434–35.

My prospective husband will energetically support me in working for the benefit of our people. We will support and complement each other. And how do I now see me fulfilling my dreams? I will continue to study, even when I am married. It is a pity that I will have to leave our school behind but Roekmini and the younger sisters will stay and devote themselves to it. It is filling a long felt need and I hope to continue this work in Rembang. Should parents still hesitate to entrust their daughters to two single women then that objection is removed now that a married woman will be heading the school. And if I succeed in my mission, I will be making the best propaganda possible that can be made for our cause.

My forthcoming marriage will also benefit our struggle. It stimulates parents, encourages them to give their daughters an education. This deed will speak to them more than a thousand emotive words. They can now see that the Regent of Rembang wishes to take as his wife a girl without means, not beautiful and no longer young, whose mental and spiritual gifts he holds in higher regard than beauty and riches.

That is the story of my engagement. A wide, beautiful field lies before us to labour in. The influence of a Regent's wife will be greater than that of a Regent's daughter. God willing, I will not only be able to educate children but also exercise an influence on their mothers. Instead of my wings being clipped, they will grow in length and strength and I will be able to spread them out wide.

It is wonderful that I will now be able to provide many with a free education. I had dreamed of becoming mother to many, now amongst my children there will also be some of my own, the children of my future husband. I will have boys and girls to raise, my task will be broad and varied but that will only give greater breadth and depth to my work. Initially I was planning to still first go to Batavia and to attempt to finish in one year but something intervened that obliged me to give up that idea.

Something else that is wonderful about my new place of residence. My dearest girlfriend – my beloved sea, I will also have there in my immediate neighbourhood. Rembang is also a quiet place, a sister town to Jepara and for that reason will also be dear to me.

I hope that my future home will be large enough to accommodate many children. When I am there I will have even less time to write[124] (but you won't notice that).

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[124] Ovink-Soer's 1904 obituary, which quotes the same letter extract, ends: 'than here, where the preparation for it already took up so much time. But you know how I love to have lots to do.'

To Mevrouw van Kol

1 August 1903

My dear loyal Friend

Just a short word in order to inform you as soon as possible of a new turn in my life. I shall not embark on our wonderful task as a woman alone; a fine, noble man will be standing at my side in my efforts to undertake useful work for our people. He has preceded me in this role, has already earned his spurs in a field where I have yet to begin. Oh! He is such a dear, kind man. Aside from a noble heart he has an intelligent and clear mind. He has been where his young bride would so dearly like to go but may not because of her people: Holland.

This is significant change but together, each supporting and supplementing the other we will go directly and by the shortest path to achieve the realization of our dreams for the welfare of our people.

We can agree on many, many issues. And now you don't even yet know who my fiancé is: Raden Adipati Djojo Adiningrat, Regent of Rembang.

And now, adieu! I will write more soon, and then I hope in detail. Give my warm regards to your husband and children from me, and accept a hearty kiss yourself from Roekmini and from your

Kartini.

To Mevrouw Abendanon- Mandri

1 August 1903

My dearest Moedertje,

My heart flew to you but it was as though a mysterious power held me back, held my hand tightly – I did not write to you.

Why torture ourselves, why poke about in the wounds of my soul? We can only appeal to God about our suffering, not a single person can help us. Only God can heal what he wounds. You need not say a word, I know, I feel what you have been and are going through. You love me dearly, I know it, and I feel I am a small part of your very soul. Poor heart, how you must have suffered and must still be suffering, and then to be ailing physically as well.

Moeder, my Moeder, must this really be the fate of your child? Is this really the will, the holy will of the Al. Father, who Nellie taught us to love above everything? So much seems to point to this fact?

Because the children of God are happy,
Happy even in struggle and duty;
Life has its dark side,
But there is light in their souls.

All that flowers in this earthly life must die,
But in the heart at peace in God,
In the soil of a higher life
A renewed spirit flowers forever.[125]

I want to be worthy of the highest title that exists: child of God. Had I not told you that already long ago we had given up any desire for personal happiness? Now life is coming to lay claim to that promise. Nothing will be too bitter, too heavy, too difficult for us if, thereby, it allows us to contribute a grain of sand towards the building of that beautiful monument: the future of the people.

Now I am being toasted: of what worth am I?

Yesterday – it was another big day for us. We received the papers from the Department of Education, Religion and Industry in which it was asked whether or not we wished to take advantage of the opportunity offered us to undertake a course in teacher training, etc. In the case that we did not, we would have to provide a declaration in writing to this effect that would be sent to the G.G. How did we feel? Like one condemned to be hanged who had himself to pull the rope that would cause his death.

Enough – we will drink this cup to the last drop. Now another big request of your husband, would you pass this on to His Excellency and send me the answer, Moedertje? How should the required declaration be phrased? Brief and businesslike, that I no longer wish to take advantage of the opportunity, because I have become engaged, or, because now an even better opportunity has been offered to me to enable me to realize my dreams of working for our people. At the side of a fine, noble man whom I respect, who with me, loves the people and who will powerfully support my endeavour, I will be far more useful in the service of our people, than the two of us would be as independent women. And Roekmini no longer wishes to take advantage of this opportunity, because she cannot, may not and does not wish to, go alone. She will try to achieve her goals through some other means. And then to thank and commend the Government that has once again shown that above

[125] It has not been possible to trace the origin of the verses quoted here.

all it is concerned to advance the interests of the people, where a child of the people has raised its voice, it gave heed, where she expressed her wishes for the future advancement of her people, it fulfilled those wishes. As a result of this, the Netherlands has come even closer to us. We are now convinced that the Netherlands desires it: the Netherlands desires the welfare of the Indies.

This would be no empty sentiment – we mean it.

Oh, I beg you, do not let anyone have the slightest inkling of what is going on deep, deep within my soul. The secret of my soul only you and a few of those here know. Let no one suspect that I have made a sacrifice for the sake of loved ones. May my sacrifice not be in vain. Let the people despise me, even those whose opinion I value but who do not know my motives, the real motives for my decision. These they may not know, never know. I will not reveal the real situation to any of the friends in Holl. I know I am putting their friendship to the test. I can afford to lose that together with their respect. But there is One who sees me, knows me, and judges me, and to that One I shall hold fast. I have to repay a great debt. The debt to those who have raised me from a tender, fragile thing to what I am now.

I have taught others to know what the word 'mother' means, have taught them love and gratitude. Should I not be the first then, to set them an example? No one needs know how bitter my road is.

> Spreading flowers along your pathways
> Weaving love in your fate
> Spreading peace and happiness
> Like a child of rich parents!
> That is how you learn to love God
> According to your youth
> According to the lessons of love
> Which forgive, comfort and uplift.

I imprint these wonderful words in my heart. It is not only the wish of my parents which is being fulfilled, but also that of many others. All those who know me amongst my countrymen desired and prayed this for me. 'Bendoro Ajeng Tini must not end up anywhere else than in a Kabupaten.' And the innocent at heart are happy that the realization of their dreams is coming nearer. And the people are happy, because it is also their wish for their 'Bendoro'. 'You see,' my simple friends exclaimed triumphantly, 'the wish of many is stronger than that of yours.' Vox populi vox dei. If this is correct then

as a result of a higher guiding force my life has taken another direction than that which I selected for myself.

'Be a blessing, a comfort to many, be the tree in whose shadow many will find a resting place during the heat of the day' is the blessing of many an old person for me. May that wish be fulfilled. May I meet the expectations of the simple at heart.

A great task, in fact, lay before me, tremendously heavy, and if I can bring it to fruition then I will have served our people – should I not be able to do it in some other way?

To achieve my mission, the best possible propaganda I can make for the cause will be for me the most bitter. Nevertheless, for my countrymen my future is the most beautiful and most enviable imaginable. The forthcoming marriage itself will be beneficial. It stimulates the parents, encourages them to have their daughters educated. More than a thousand impassioned words, these forthcoming deeds will speak to the hearts of our countrymen. They are confronted by a fact: beauty and wealth are disdained in favour of moral and spiritual qualities.

The Regent of Rembang was in a position to marry beautiful, rich girls who were also capable of speaking Dutch, living in his close vicinity – it is said that he had been asked to marry someone – poor, poor girl. Oh! Such terrible things happen in our society. But he saw past all those temptations, his eye searched out and fastened on a girl, poor and ugly, whose name was so talked about, such a household name, ridiculed, mocked, condemned, as no other Native girl had ever been before her, but whom he knew had a quality, something he greatly valued.

Oh, that your child had to generate propaganda in this fashion for her cause, to work in this way for her people!

I remember my own words when someone asked me how one should approach the education of our women, our girls: 'The Javanese people, like other traditional peoples, are children of the sun, infatuated with glitter and sparkle. Well then, respond to that, give them what their heart desires, but at the same time something of value.'

'Give an ill child quinine tablets without further encouragement and it will resist, but coat the tablet in sugar, and gild it, and the child will eagerly stretch out its hand to it. When older, more mature, the child will need neither sugar nor gilding to take tablets, because it knows that they are necessary for its health.'

I little realized then that I foretold my own future, that I myself would be that tablet and the Regent of Rembang my sugar and gilt. And the greatest irony is

that I myself must swallow that bitter pill. So be it! Now we will not have to roughly disturb the traditions and customs of our land, our childlike people will have its glitter and sparkle and simultaneously get its health-giving tablets.

The freeing of women is inevitable – it will come, only we cannot hasten its coming. The freedom of women will be the fruit of our suffering and pain. His daughters will no doubt be those free women since they will have an enlightened woman as mother and educator. But some of the other girls who I will teach will, I believe, share the same fate as me, because their parents are like ours. Poor children! They cannot avoid their destiny, it must come, but after that, inevitably – the triumph!

We will not experience it, but what does that matter? We have helped build the path which has led to it – and that already is wonderful!

Be assured he will not clip my wings – it was precisely my ability to fly that raised me in his estimation. For this reason he will give me even more opportunities to stretch my wings, he will increase my field of work. It is your daughter he appreciates, not the house drudge who it may be imagined she might become.

With pained amazement I heard in Semarang on the last occasion that I was there that others had had the same idea as the Regent of Rembang. They had never dared mention it, they were frightened I would scratch their eyes out, and they allowed me, who believed myself to be totally safe, to walk on a volcano. Sadly I ask myself, 'Can our men then not admire without immediately wanting to own?' How much higher, then, is the plane upon which we women exist: we can admire, respect, without desiring to possess. For me to be able to admire, to respect, already brings happiness.

'Her and no other!' What a demand, I had to laugh – this is said by someone who has a beautiful wife, with whom he has 5 children. Oh, and that was the man who we had admired and respected for more than 10 years, the course of whose life we had followed, about whose humiliation and sorrow we had grieved, and whose joy we had celebrated.[126] And yet, had we ever desired to possess? We did long for a meeting of spirits, to enable them to work together for the realization of a great Idea! And we had intended after we had fought for our freedom to seek out that spirit, if he did not of himself seek us out.

We knew nothing of his private life, only recently did we hear one or two things. More evidence of our argument that the mother-educator has a significant task to perform in society. On the basis of his spirit, we could draw the most wonderful conclusions about his moral superiority but we forgot

[126] There is no indication who this may have referred to.

that while his mother may have been an exemplary mother, she was not the educator that he needed.

It is a pity, now he is lost to us – he would not want to work with us. One of the few beacons in this country, now lost to us. Fortunately, more and more light is coming to our Javanese sky!

Should your acquaintances ask after us, tell them what I have written to you on the first pages of this letter.

In a silly mood or in an unguarded moment, I do not remember, I said to my sister: 'You know what I would dearly like? To attend a ball with the Abendanon family at the Concordia, you and I, dressed alike in a silk kain with gold thread, a pink silk kebaya with silver embroidery, a head piece from Solo with melatis in our hair.'

'What a worldly wish and that while you are making such serious plans.'

'Why not, it is no sin, I want to be young and silly one more time.'

That silly wish will be fulfilled, not with you, at a ball in the Concordia, but I will be dressed in this fashion. The costume, which I unintentionally wished for, is that of a bride. Only brides wear silk kains with gold thread, only married women wear flowers in their hair.

Did an evil spirit put those words into my mouth? Kardinah had also expressed a foolish wish – it was fulfilled and cost her a broken heart.

We both have a wish, a dear, dear wish, that you may think foolish, but which is neither silly nor worldly. Its fulfilment, forgive us, depends on you, Moedertje. It is very, very impolite, but we would like it so very, very much. If we did not love you so much and were not convinced that our love was returned, then we would never have thought of it, to tell you the innermost longings of our heart – yes then that wish would never have existed. Because it was our love that called it into existence: the wish to have a talisman from you both – to wear for the rest of our lives. Forgive us our rudeness: oh, we cannot silence it, we must tell you, our desire is so great, we have the belief it will protect us and save us from temptation.

What is our heart's desire? From you both a simple ring with a golden heart in which both your names are engraved, to wear for the rest of our lives.

And now, goodnight Moedertje! Give your husband warm regards from all of us here. For you a long heartfelt kiss from my sister and from your own daughter

Kartini

Yesterday I sent off a chest of woodcarving to you – also two tortoiseshell boxes – one for you and one for Oost en West. The two fire screens are also

for Oost en West. Tomorrow I will send you the list of contents together with the memorandum. A delightful picture frame has been completed, tomorrow I will send this and another fire screen to Oost en West also.

I had more tables made, one with an open carved edge – I will send it to you. You can then take the one you like best. I will have other things made for you. I had forgotten to pack the pens for your table, they are still lying on my writing desk, I will send them to you.

And may I also send you my poetry book?

My health is fine – I am progressing – the obat from Dr Schmidt helped marvellously – the last few nights I have been sleeping soundly – Quinine, broomkalie – and something else. Goodnight, sleep well.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

4 August 1903

Postcard

Dearest Moedertje,

Just a brief word to accompany the memorandum attached. What a pile of money I have spent once again. I have started again with the work that I have so sadly neglected, gave the workers their orders. They must not suffer because I feel poorly. How are things with you? Will I hear something from you soon? I so long to hear something.

Didi is not coming – why not? Not for reasons of ill health, I hope? Give him my warmest regards. This morning I had a particularly interesting visit, with which we were greatly pleased. A sweet young thing, a Native Christian woman, midwife, 19 years of age, has already been working for a year. Lucky child! She came from Mojowarno – has been corresponding with Dr Adriani. She will return next week and then will stay with us for a week or so. How pleased you would be to meet her. So young, and such a fine person. She is the most outstanding one says Dr Adriani. She was so frightened when I took her by the hand to take her into the room – it was the first time she was in the company of priyayi.[127]

Adieu Moedertje! My best wishes to you both. A kiss from your little daughter

Kartini

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127 The Mojowarno mission community had initially grown out of a community formed of poor villagers.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

8 August 1903
Postcard

My dearest Moedertje,

I am very concerned about you – your last letter is already from so long ago and at that time you were unwell. 'How is my Moedertje? I ask myself constantly, day after day, and then I pray: 'Dear God, let my beloved be well!

Moedertje dearest, do please, if you can, send me greetings by postcard. I am pining for my Moeske, my dearest, devoted Friend.

Do you know what today is? The 3rd anniversary of our meeting. Three years ago 3 young girls rejoiced about a priceless gift from God! Friends of her heart! The young girls have become women. Life has carved wrinkles in the still, young faces, their hearts have been dragged through fire. Have they been consumed, burnt to ashes, or emerged from the pool of fire, purified? Mama is ill, Roekmini is ill … and it is all extremely sad. Poor, poor Parents – I am so fond of them. Think no more of my fate. It is bearable or not depending on how I perceive it. From whence do I draw my strength, my comfort? By thinking as little as possible about myself, and as much as possible, and in the first place, about others.

Now I know what a blessing is contained in the wise saying: 'To forget oneself, to think of oneself last.'

In this I am but a novice. We have always said, and seriously meant it, that nothing would be too much for us, if what we did would be of benefit to others. We had had in mind a particular method of helping, and had considered nothing else. We would be happy if we could assist in that manner. Egotism was certainly involved in this – we had come to see ourselves in terms of that means of being useful to others, of being of service. The fulfilment of that wish would have made us happy. So that was clearly in part, egotism.

And now there is no chance of it happening. I lose and I gain …

Grieve no longer, bury this sorrow – together with much else – deep, deep in your heart.

Do not forget that it was I myself who has accepted. He approached this in a totally honourable way – if anyone has been untruthful then it is we two. We had been arranging things behind our Parent's back – <u>not</u> they behind ours. We are in possession of all the letters that have been exchanged. My fiancé will come here shortly to decide the day.

Commend me to Him without Whom nothing takes place. And now, 'night dearest! Warmest kiss from your

K.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

14 August 1903

Dearest Moedertje,

Thank you so much for your letter, which was so welcome. I have not yet received the letter from your husband that you had mentioned. I am so afraid it has got lost, I would regret that so much.

We have just now been having such a wonderful time around the table. Where I am now sitting the five of us were working – Justinah, the midwife and the four of us. She arrived this morning and will stay with us until next week. We think she is a darling, a treasure. She spends her time here quite usefully, she is learning some handicrafts from us – just before she was embroidering slippers. She is very quick, she picked up the knack for it immediately. How rich I felt this morning when she trustingly leant her head against my shoulder while I was explaining some things to her. Now she feels at home with us. I so love looking at her intelligent eyes that are so full of life.

She is a child from the desa – oh, what guidance motivated by love cannot achieve! You would find her such a joy. Of course we told her about our Moedertje and she listened with such interest and asked such interested questions. Should you ever come this way again then I would hope to be able to bring her to you. The brave young woman has already assisted 48 women in childbirth. And oh, it is still such a young thing, still almost a child. Had she a child of her own she would give it to me, she told someone. She would very much like to learn Dutch from us – but how would that be possible? I wish we lived near each other!

Very busy and important days lie before us, when they have passed you will receive a long letter from us and perhaps we will then tell you when that most important day will be. The Regent of Rembang will be coming here on the 17th – I have asked that he bring his children. I would very much like to meet them, my future. Those children are my future, for them I want to live and to work and to struggle and to suffer if need be. I hope they will come to be fond of me. That is the only demand I make of their mothers: to make their children totally mine. And that is also what I will ask their father: to hand over totally his children to me. My dream: to make of the children my own. May that time approach.

There are others who offer me their children, for instance the Assistant Collector here, a wealthy son of a Regent: 'Make my child your servant, let her clean the floor. Fetch the water, anything you want, as long as she can be with you!'

I listened to him with a smile, inside me there were tears. I said nothing, promised nothing, nothing – only prayed fervently that I could enfold all those

little ones who had been entrusted to me close to my heart, to cherish with my love!

I will only take one child with me to my new home, a girl of about eight given to me by her parents. She is the daughter of a teacher and has been to school. She is a gorgeous child, very quick and able. If she is suited I will have her trained for a vocation. In the meantime she is receiving sewing lessons from the sisters.

In Rembang there are women with the same education as ours with whom I will associate. My future sister-in-law has also been 'contaminated' by Western education. That will be nice for me. It will be a great disappointment to the Regent of R. to learn that I do not play piano – he has one. I regret it for his sake but I have no talents to display.

Ma and my sisters have recovered, thank God, but they are both still looking very poorly.

The photograph I sent you was only taken last month after my recovery. It is said I am thinner. I agree, I notice it in my clothes. My sister and I have both become older. I am now completely recovered.

Goodbye, Moeske! Give your husband greetings from us all and receive a warm embrace from your own daughter,

Kartini

To the Government[128]

24 August 1903

First of all we wish to respectfully thank the Government which has once again demonstrated how much it takes to heart the interests of the people of this land, and where children of the people expressed themselves, asked for support for attempts to be of service to their compatriots, they were prepared to provide this.

Because of a higher goal, however, the assistance that was requested and granted has since become superfluous.

Although this is along quite a different route than that which we had envisaged ourselves, our dreams will nevertheless be achieved more directly than we had ever thought possible.

What more could we wish for in our attempts to be of use to others than to be energetically supported by a fine noble man who understands us, shares our

[128] This note formally ends Kartini's four year 'campaign' but includes a final defiant criticism of Islamic tradition.

ideals and who in that respect has already proved himself where we still first need to set our feet?

We had already begun our work here on a small scale and the eagerness with which parents made use of the opportunity offered to have their daughters learn more than just reading the Koran fills our hearts with glad hopes and dreams for the future.

Now that Kartini will soon be married with the Regent of Rembang and will not now be going to Batavia to study, Roekmini now also no longer wishes to make use of the opportunity offered her at the request of us both to qualify herself in drawing, nursing, and handicraft. She cannot, may not and does not wish to go to Batavia alone. She will now try to reach her goal through some other means but in the meantime she has enough to do attending to her little school.

We both respectfully present our deeply felt gratitude to the Government for its goodwill.

Kartini Roekmini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

25 August 1903

My dearest Moeske,

A letter for you was lying in my writing folder, why I did not send it I don't know myself. Now it is too old to send and I have torn it up. You are now getting a different letter and at the same time a reply to yours, that we received this afternoon.

Thank you for the postal order for *f* 91:50. I cried so bitterly before when I read your letter. It is so dreadful that once again some of the woodcarving has been damaged. What do I have to do? Perhaps there is too much in the chest? Or does the blame lie with the railways? Should I send it by sea in future? That way everything used to arrive safely. But it is such an effort for me – there is no one in Semarang who will organize it for me. I will think about it, write to Daendels[129]; perhaps it is much easier than I thought. There is still a superb three-piece screen for Oost en West and 6 large picture frames made on order. I do not dare send them for fear of breakage. I shall pack the screen separately, with a great deal of straw; it is such a delicate piece.

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[129] No further information could be located about this person.

Do you remember that small woodcarving that I sent you that you had ordered, twice in fact? Just send the sketches. While I am still at home you can send me whatever you wish. So do it quickly, do not wait, give me your requests and send me the models.

My days at home are numbered. Just 2 more months and then they will be coming to fetch me. You know that my future guardian and his younger brother, the Regent of Tuban, were here. The day has been fixed, it will be 12 November, in private, only family members will be present, and neither of us will be wearing wedding costume, just our pakians. He will be in his uniform and me as you have always seen me. This is the wish of us both.

Regrettably his children did not accompany him, they are still so young and the journey is so tiring. I have been misinformed, he has 7 not 6 of whom the eldest is only 8 years younger than me, after whom there is a girl of 7, and then it ranges down to 1½ – 4 girls and 3 boys.

My wish is fulfilled! I will become the mother and sister of very, very many. His family is 2X as large as ours. He has 24 brothers and sisters of whom 22 are still alive, 10 of his own mother and 14 of his second mother. His father is still alive, a fine man of 77. And all his brothers and sisters are, thank God, useful members of society. There is not a place in East Java that does not have a member of his family in the administration. And a nice thing is that his family is, like ours, very close, they support and help each other.[130]

My future relatives are looking forward to my arrival to give me their children to educate.

I will have a wide field of labour there and, thank God, I will not be standing alone. He has promised to give me his complete support. You know what my conditions are, they were immediately accepted without any demur. That is also what he wished, had hoped and desired: to be able to support me in my efforts to be of service to our people. He himself has been active in this regard for years. He also wants to provide training and education and, as he cannot do this himself, he has it done through others. Several relatives of his are being educated at his expense. What he expects from me is benefits for his family and his people. May he not be disappointed!

What makes me very grateful is that his family shares his feelings, are pleased with his choice. They are expecting me as the future educator of their children. And it is in that role that I shall come – I will not think about all the other. Sometimes I completely forget that I will be losing so many beautiful

130 Kartini's extended family similarly provided a network of regional rulers throughout Central Java.

dreams, I think that I will be following my vocation along some other path than that which I had chosen myself. And I will continue to think this, it brings me peace and contentment.[131]

Nothing is perfect and nothing must be perfect in this world. I had hoped, wished and prayed that I could be the mother and the sister of many and God has heard my prayer, even if a little differently (!) from what I had meant it to be.

He now knows precisely what I represent and he says that this is just what he had been searching for and wanted. He has promised not to obstruct me in any way and indeed, to support be energetically because it is also a dream of his to assist in helping to uplift our people. We are in agreement on many issues, in others we are not, these we pass over in silence. Someone who knows many regents well has said of him: 'Most Regents think the people exist for them, very few think they exist for the people. And the Regent of Rembang belongs to that select few.' He is truly very good to the people and to his subordinate officials who worship him.

He made a very pleasant impression, is extremely reserved, a virtue which unfortunately your daughter has yet to learn. His only failing is that he stands between me and my love. I had better not speak of it otherwise I will give vent to my gall. It is a great pity that he does not wish to speak Dutch which he does know very well.

Does he perhaps do this because of his poor late wife who could not speak Dutch? Is it modesty that acts as a disguise for pride? I will try to discover the reason. He has studied in Leiden. Heer Sollewijn Gelpe[132] was his guardian. Let us hope he is a good friend to Europeans.[133]

Later both of you must come and see how your daughter is faring in Rembang. I hope the school will have been established by then. This will eventuate as long as the government has no objection. We will correspond extensively

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131 Although Kartini is adept at obscuring 'the facts' in letters to different correspondents, there is no reason to believe that she is withholding her true feelings about her intended husband. Thus while able to admire his qualities, she does not disguise 'the gall' at being deprived of her ideal and later letters reflect her deep sorrow at this – and the horror of having to enter a polygamous marriage.

132 Sollewijn Gelpe was the resident of Surabaya.

133 This account of RMAA Djojo Adiningrat suggests he is one of the growing number of 'enlightened' regents drawing on the support of the growing circle of reform-minded colonial officials to improve the conditions of the populations in their region. The more radical calls for change, however, were coming from those Western-educated Indonesians situated outside the central colonial bureaucracy of the Binnenlands Bestuur, and journalists, albeit typically in other branches of an expanding colonial administration such as the students at STOVIA, but also gradually from independent journalists such as Abdul Rivai.

about this with your husband whose letter to date we have unfortunately not received. Undoubtedly it has been lost.

I could not wait any longer – 2 summonses have arrived from the Resident about this matter and yesterday we handed in the required declaration. I hope this will be in accordance with your husband's wishes.

Perhaps we will come to Batavia ourselves to discuss our school. I already have a detailed plan in regard to it. I hope the government will have no objections to it.

The day before yesterday the Collector was here the whole evening with Father to talk about his young daughter who he wishes to hand over to me to take responsibility for her education. His wife has already spoken to me about it – and now the father has come to speak to my Father about it. I will also be getting other children from here, I do not know if I will be taking them all. I find it difficult to refuse but I do not want to promise anything. We will see how it goes. But 2 little girls will certainly be coming – my daughter and the daughter of the Collector – two dear, beautiful children.

I am determined not to give myself over to become a prisoner of the so-called 'conversation'. We will establish specific days for that distasteful duty, on other days I will not be available, except for urgent business for very important matters. I will no doubt be forgiven when it is realized I do not do this from pride but because I want to spend my time usefully in the service of others, perhaps even of their own children. I will of course need to begin by trying to win people over to my side.

Fortunately, Rembang is a quiet place and the wonderful thing is that he dislikes going out as much as I do. I am happy that the resident of that area also has an interest in our work. I will therefore not come as an unknown quantity. And who will I find there but my great friend, the sea. It is a bare 100 paces from the house.

When they told him I was very interested in craftwork and the industries of our people he said that there were also some goldsmiths and woodcarvers there, they were waiting for some direction. He is also involved in that. That is therefore a good sign. And listen to this: perhaps our good old Singgowirio, that is the man from Blakang Gunung, may come with me. He would not have been able to follow his bendoro to Batavia but now that the direction has changed he is quite interested. We have good plans for him. In order to develop this industry into something reasonable it first needs to have capital and proper direction. A large workshop needs to be established – many workmen need to be employed and apprentices trained and made to work under regular supervision in our vicinity. As long as the money is there – it would need several thousand

to build a workplace, to buy materials, to maintain workmen and to train many apprentices. Singo would be in charge of this.

I believe that within a year, at most two, the capital that was invested would have been retrieved. I had wanted to do this here but in view of our expected departure to Batavia decided not to proceed. Our younger ones would then have had to carry the responsibility for it and that would have been too much of a burden for them. The responsibility would be quite significant. Now it will be different, we can be responsible for it and if we can get the necessary money for it then I believe that such craft industries will have a bright future.

Recently we were travelling with Heer Brandes, the brother of Dr Brandes,[134] who is very interested in the crafts of this region. When I mentioned the idea of a shop selling native crafts in Semarang he was immediately interested. You must know that the public in Semarang are reluctant to order things from Batavia that come from close by. Several people wanted to speak to us about it – but we persisted in our resolve and directed them to O en W. Privately, however, I had pondered on ways of meeting their wishes and it appeared to me the best means of doing so would be for O en W to open a shop in Semarang. But for that, once again, money would be necessary and O en W does not have the means.

When I mentioned this to Heer Brandes he replied: 'Oh, don't worry about that. The money will be available as long as you take care of the other.'

I said: 'But it would have to be someone with taste to run things in Semarang.'

'That can be arranged as long as you ensure that there will be beautiful objects available.'

I received a letter from him – he had already spoken to a number of people, had found a great deal of interest with promises of financial support. He has already written to Heer van Lawick about it and is awaiting his answer before proceeding further.

I also spoke to him about our other idea for promoting the woodcarving industry. And he immediately asked how much money we would need for it. I have not yet mentioned a firm figure to him because I still have to speak to some experts about this – how much a workshop would cost, how much the wood would cost, how much would need to be paid to the woodcarvers over several months in wages.

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134 Dr JLA Brandes (1857–1905) was well known for his studies of Hindu monuments and manuscripts and languages of the archipelago published by the Bataviaasch Genootschap.

The workshop initially has to be very simple, the main point is this: there has to be enough money for about 50 people to be able to work without interruption, that is to say, would not have to depend for their wages on the sale of their work. Rembang will be an excellent place for woodcarving because it is a region where jati is to be found and there is a lot of sono wood. And Singo himself thinks it is an excellent idea. As long as there is money available!

If all goes well, what a following I will have! But then that is why I am a modern woman! For certain I am bringing with me a strange dowry. There are also civil servants who are now wanting to request transfer to Rembang. The Regent of Rembang is marrying an entire city but then why did he try to put himself between the people and their bride?

Oh goodness, how unfortunate it is; I will get there during the busiest time of the year. Puasa – Lebaran – New Year. I have already said I do not want to be foot-kissed.[135] I have never allowed anyone to do this to me. I want to have a place in their heart, not outward show. I would rather not think about it, otherwise I will get a headache – I think only of our school.

I cannot imagine a future without Roekmini. How will I survive without her, and she without me? If I think about that I will lie awake throughout the night. If we cannot survive without each other then I will go and get her. She is such a dear, sweet child, we are so close.

The Regent of Rembang is taking away from me that which I hold dear and yet I cannot deny he has given me back a great gift. Something very dear that Life has taken from me, suffering has restored. I have regained my soul child and sister. Then suffering has reunited Kardinah and me, never to be separated again. I have never mentioned it but I suffered so much from our separation – now we have found each other again and we will never, never let each other go again. Who knows if we cannot return her to the land of the living.

And now, goodbye Moeske! I wish you all the best and all my love. Give our heartiest greetings to your husband from us all here and for you a kiss from E and your own

K

A request from Mama to your husband if His Excellency would be so kind as to arrange to get her 10 to 15 silver dollars. We will send you the money as soon as we know what it costs.

The leaf that lady means is ‘sri gading’ – not sirih gading: we use the flowers. Is it not for blood pressure?

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135 This ritual, to pay respects and ask forgiveness from elders, is part of the Lebaran festivities.

To Mijnheer Abendanon

14 September 1903

Most Highly Respected Sir

Recently I informed you by telegram of the engagement of our daughter, Kartini, to the Regent of Rembang.

This letter serves to thank you sincerely, also on behalf of my wife, for everything you have done to realize the ambitions of our children. The assistance that they have requested and which you have provided through your powerful support, has now become unnecessary.

I hope you will be able to forgive us that we have caused you so much trouble for nothing.

When you were here on January I had already told you that I had no objections to our two oldest daughters wanting to study in order to later be able to establish a school for daughters of Native officials but that, if they should meet someone worthy, then I would prefer that they married.

The Regent of Rembang is someone whom we, and Kartini also, respect highly and to whom we can entrust our Child in the fullest confidence, convinced that she would be in the best of hands. In him she will find an excellent husband who will respect her and will support and appreciate her values. They are spiritual soulmates and at his side, powerfully supported by him, she will be able to realize her plans more effectively and sooner.

The marriage will take place on 8 November.

We know that you are both fond of our daughters and we are grateful for it. Join us in hoping that the forthcoming marriage will lead to the happiness of our Child and her new surroundings.

Our respectful greetings from all of us to you

Yours respectfully

Your obedient servant
Sosroningrat

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

October 1903

Moedertje, my Moedertje, say something to me, I am so utterly, utterly unhappy. Physically, spiritually broken. I have no energy any more. For days already it has been as if there is a fire in my head, as if my heart is a burning bullet.

I am assumed to be still alive but is this living? There are worse things than death. And when I am dead, what will that have achieved? Nothing! Other than that I have obstructed some people, tripped them up in their egotism. Oh my poor, poor dreams, my poor sisters.

The house is as though deserted, the bird no longer chirps, it is lying with broken wings, a broken heart, oh and a heart full of terrible, evil thoughts. Do you despise me, yes? It is hard, but still bearable. But I cannot respect myself, that I cannot bear.

My God have mercy on me! Show me the way.

Say something to me, do not maintain your silence. May I ask this of you, I who can feel what it must cost you to write to me, who feels how each thought of me must pain you? And as if I did not know how much you thought of me?

I am cruel to come to you now. My poor, poor Moedertje! But oh, I am so wretchedly, wretchedly sad. Forgive!

Your
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

19 October 1903

Dear Moedertje,

How I felt on receiving your letter can be more easily appreciated than described. For more than a month I have been without news from you, the last letter I received from you was dated 24 August. Oh Moedertje, and I needed you so. I called out and waited and you were not there.

I was ill when your letter arrived, I was lying on the daybed, my back supported by cushions – I had been coughing for days and there have been nights that I could not sleep a wink. For several weeks already I have not been able to come to the table for dinner, nor go outside. And they are now my final days at home! Days that I had looked forward to with melancholy and trepidation but also with a sense of passionate desire!

First about the missing letters. Need I say how much that grieves me? I am very sad about it. Mijnheer ill and I knew nothing of it – Moedertje anxious and concerned and I was not with you. All this grieves me so much.

How is Mijnheer now and how are you by yourself, dearest? God grant that these words will find you both in good health.

Oh, how I regret terribly that that long and important letter of yours has been lost. Tell me more about Mevrouw Essers,[136] of her plan, about your plans and then tell me what you want me to do. I will do it! Write a memorandum? And what? Would you repeat this clearly for me? You must understand that it is this that attaches me to life, keeps me alive! That is my life, my heart, my soul! Should that great dream die then my life is also finished.

My father was most indignant when he heard about these lost letters. He had also noticed that nothing was coming from you any longer. Father had not wanted to ask me in order to avoid causing me pain. Father had thought that I had had an argument with you, that perhaps you had broken with me because of what had happened in recent times. This morning Father went to the post office to speak to the postmaster about the missing letters. It was there that Father was informed that you had already written to the postmaster about it.

Have you any idea who the person may have been who did this unseemly deed? The postmaster here thinks that the blame lies either in Semarang or in Batavia. I think it's terrible. How I had waited and waited for that letter from Mijnheer! And now several letters of yours have gone astray as well! Have there then constantly been bad spirits around me? Am I surrounded by enemies?[137]

I shall not mention it again, it has made me so upset.

Have you heard already? The date has been brought forward – at his urgent request. It will not be on the 12th but the 8th Nov., in the afternoon about 5 o'clock and the departure from home to my new cage will be on Wednesday the 11th.

Do you still remember what I had asked you last year to ask Dr Snouck Hurgronje?[138] And what his reply had been! Think about it and keep it to yourself. That is the evil thought. But is it in fact a crime? I was truthful, honest and frank – I did give [him] warning. Poor man, he thought that Fortune was leading him and did not know that he was reaching out a hand to Fate. Now he is dreaming the sweetest dreams, weaving himself golden and rose-coloured illusions just as I had before he broke into my life. Whose dreams will be realized? What dreadful days await me. Strengthen me with your love!

A costume of disguise lies ready. Roekmini calls it a burial cloth. A letter from a bride, a bride envied by so many! Poor, foolish little world!

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136 It has not been possible to identify this person or 'the plans' to which Kartini refers.

137 Given the nature of the second proposal there is suspicion that her mail is being intercepted.

138 See Kartini's letter of 27 March 1902.

And oh, those terrible newspapers! I wished sometimes that they would mention my name in death notices – then I would have peace. Oh, I have so much to thank them for! Had the news of our expected arrival at the public school for girls in Batavia not appeared in the papers in June, then we would have been safely there. He would have waited a little longer, we would have been safely in Batavia. When he heard that a decision had been made about our departure he said: 'Now or never!' He saw clearly that once out of the house there would be no getting us back, other than completely against our will.

When I think of that the gall rises in me again.

And then the portraits in *Eigen Haard*. I must have had a premonition that they would bring us trouble, which was why I was angry about it.

I have here a photo of the children and the house, my prison or my 'school'? God only knows what the future will bring.

You would like to know how we would like the rings? Oh Moeske! Do you really not think it too impolite? But you do understand we would not ask just anyone but could only ask it of someone who we loved deeply. A ring with a golden heart on it and on that heart both your initials engraved. Do you know what my sister and I wear around our neck, on a black velvet ribbon? The small perfume bottles which you gave us when we were with you and which you had worn as a child.

And now, goodnight dearest. Our best wishes to you both. Give Mijnheer our very best wishes and for you a kiss from your daughter,

Kartini.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

22 October 1903

My dearest, my only Moedertje,

How is the state of health of you both at the moment? Have you picked up again and has Mijnheer fully recovered? I think so much about you both, constantly asking myself, 'How are they?' And then a quiet heartfelt prayer: 'Oh, may those dear, kind people long to be spared for their loved ones and for the many who cannot be without them in their lives.'

My poor Moedertje, I must be very cruel to let you hear the cry for help from my soul, knowing how that would affect you and that you are powerless to do anything.

Could you really believe that I had found peace and contentment, or that I could still find it? There are wounds that will never heal, there are tears that will never dry. Unseen by the world, the heart weeps on until it stops to find peace in the cool lap of the earth.

Grieve no longer, my dearest. I have regained my health and composure and calmly await that which will form my future.

With this I am sending you several photos, photos of that which fills my thoughts and what forms my future. A poor photo of my humble friends in Blakang Genung – humble in their habits, unselfconsciously great through their art – 2 photos of our school from which 5 pupils are missing amongst whom are 2 married women – what is amazing is the courage of one of them to dare, at her age, to begin to learn – and besides that a photo of our future school, the boarding school manager and his children, soon to be our very own first pupils.[139]

We ourselves will never be so well-off but nor can I endure anything more bitter and more humiliating either.

As long as the school is established – that is, established for the benefit of others – then everything will not be of any consequence for me and I will learn to bear it. I certainly am determined not to become involved in the housekeeping for which, by the way, I have absolutely no ability. Others more suited to this task will have to undertake that function.

From the very beginning this had been my condition. I cannot give any more than what I can. What can I promise, and what I did promise, is that I will try to be a good mother to his children and in exchange he would make it possible for me to realize that which I so much desire. Should he not keep to this then I will also be free from my promise. But whatever may happen in the future, I hope that I will remain correct in my behaviour that no one will have anything to remark on the way I conduct myself.

A letter from a bride two weeks before her wedding! I don't regard myself as a bride at all – how could I? The public here is indignant that I will not be dressed as a bride. Everything is 'aneh' about me. He said that he would make no fuss and now he is going to hold a feast. Oh, you have no idea how I dislike this. Naturally the entire residency will be there, will gather to see the 'amazing creature' about whom so much has been written and spoken. And the newspapers will bray about it. Awful! I could kill the person who first placed the news in the papers. That fool may have meant well but he has caused me so much pain.

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[139] The reference is to plans for her future school in Rembang.

The R. of R. then is wanting to marry again solely because a handful of Europeans thought it would be nice to attend a reception along European lines held by a native ruler. How concerned then he must be about what Europeans think. He was also rather upset by the impropriety of the papers. The inhabitants of Rembang will no doubt be put off if, when I am there, that I do not involve myself in festivities. It is fortunate that most are not married or do not have wives with them.[140] That at least is one job less.

The Native officials there who admire him are planning to welcome him festively when he returns in November. And he himself is throwing away money by the handful – for what? To what end? He does not know how to express his joy. I do not know how many times he has given a party since July, he who does not like parties. That must be the reason why I am in such good health, because my health has been drunk so often. Oh, all that upsets me so much.

How his oldest boy will hate me, I can understand it so well. Poor boy. But perhaps it will be good for him to experience suffering at such a young age. I hope one day I will manage to win his friendship. He will come home in a month's time when he has vacation from the School for Native Officials, so I will be meeting him soon.

I was so touched when I saw the photographs of the children. Their faces seemed so familiar and I thought, where had I seen them before? Then it struck me. I took out an old photograph of ours from some twelve years ago. Was it a mockery of destiny, sheer chance or a sign of God? The oldest looked exactly like me in a portrait of twelve years ago and the two others looked like Roekmini and Kardinah. It is extraordinary. And is it not remarkable that the three girls are so close in age, as we three are?

Could they be destined to become the second generation of the Indies cloverleaf? And will that leaf be able to achieve its fullest growth?

Something strange happened when the R. of R. was here. We were working outside our room – just before he arrived – and a swarm of bees came towards us, entered our room, crawled into my bed, my cupboard and where I was sitting. There I was, surrounded by bees. We fled, the bee swarm followed us, our room remained full of bees. And the remarkable thing was that at the same time that we were being overrun by bees, our servants were fully occupied in chasing out the bees from his guest room that was located in a completely different direction. Whatever we did, the bee swarm remained. For two days we literally did not dare to enter our room.

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140 The reference is to the European residents – primarily colonial officials – that she would be obliged to meet as the Raden Ayu.

As long as that is not a sign that in the future I will be stung from all quarters.

And finally, can I ask you a favour? If it is too much to ask of you then regard it as not having been asked, Moedertje. I would very much like to bring something for the little ones. I can no longer go myself to Semarang and my brother and sister cannot help me, they are both unwell – and also have no appreciation of what is required. You go to Batavia now and again, do you not? When you are there again next time would you be so kind and buy a few things for me that I would so like to bring for my new children:

- 1 unclothed doll (just with a singlet, socks and shoes) with movable limbs. My intention is to later make clothes for it with the children who can in this way learn sewing while playing.
- 1 pearl flower box (string pearls which can be made into flowers with copper wire). It is a very enjoyable pastime for children, our children enjoy this immensely and have made nice things with it.
- 1 box containing the wherewithal for making paper baskets (cardboard boxes through which strips of paper can be woven). It is part of Fröbel work, I think.
- several picture books (in colour).

Should it be too troublesome for you to send then let the shopkeeper send it for you and have the account sent at the same time. If you can help me with this then I would very much like to have the items here by the 5th. I could then pack them with my other things. Should you not come to Batavia, or if it should be too tiring for you, then regard this request as non-existent, and forgive me. Is this fine with you, Moeske? I do not know what I should bring for the little boy and for the 2 youngest tots of 3 and 1½ also I do not know what to bring.

And one other favour. Can I have Edie's address? That dear, kind boy sent me a long, moving letter. I have received many letters on a range of topics from Europe in response to recent events but none but Edie's affected me, touched my emotions that I thought had been forever ruined. Dear, kind boy – oh Moedertje, we are so very fond of him. Everything that has come to me from you is dear to me. The most precious of all, after your love, is Didi's friendship. It gives my life value. He did not want to give up hope that one day we would meet in person. Now he will have to believe with us that we are destined to meet only in spirit.

Father has received a letter dated the 17th from Mijnheer [Abendanon] and asks that His Excellency be thanked kindly. Have you any further information on the investigation of the missing letters?

Moedertje, I will get one more letter from you before that day, won't I? I must hear your voice above the roar of the voices of all those strangers. Support and strengthen me by loving me more and more. Now that I am marrying I have even more need of a pure love.

Goodnight, my dearest! Kind regards from us all to the both of you. Hold me tightly to your heart and love forever your own

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

3 November 1903

My own dearest Moeske,

How can I tell you how very, very happy, how grateful and overjoyed I am with that lovely ring that since an hour or so ago has been glittering on my finger and that will always be there. My dearest wish fulfilled! I wear the symbol of that which I regard so highly in my life, on my hand!

Moeske, how shall I, how should I thank you both for it? Oh, if only I had you here, I would kiss the hands that have given me this treasure. Now I can only give you a paper kiss. To you both my very deepest thanks for this beautiful and loving fulfilment of the dearest wish of my heart! Oh, how often don't I look at it! How time and again it fills me with joy. The golden heart with those dear names attached to my finger by a golden band. This is my most beautiful, happiest day in this last half year of melancholy and grief.

Your daughter is alive again, she lives! Your love has warmed her petrified heart. That heart glows and trembles once more and no sharp grief, no bitter, dulling desperation makes the strings tremble, a deep and heavy *love* breathes in this body!

How can I have been so ungrateful as to complain when I have such a valuable treasure? Love is the greatest thing. She who gives is the most wealthy. And I am capable of giving and I shall give like a child with a rich father. I will offer love with both hands. What you and others have given me I will repay with interest to others. Oh, there are so many who hunger and thirst for love!

Do not think I am looking forward to being a bride the way a bride ought to be. I myself had never even looked forward to being a bride. I did love someone years ago – it has long since passed – but I never coveted him. To love was enough for me. I was young, about 17, for three years the three of us lived through 'him'. In everything we did, heard, saw, he was our first thought.

Foolish child! But yet it was a lovely time that I look back to with gratitude because it was this affection which had brought the three of us together and made it possible that three souls had one thought, three hearts beat with one beat.

Who was this person? Someone who was 30, yes, thirty years older than me and at that time three times older than Kardinah. So it had nothing to do with age. Like you, I think the way things are it is good that he is so much older than me. If I have to belong to someone then I would rather belong to him than to someone else. With someone the same age I would constantly be arguing. I could not bear to be censured and a simpleton would be an abomination. I cannot be treated as an inferior and find it disgusting if someone looks up to me. I want an equal, a friend, a comrade and he will be this to me. That despite this conviction I would still like things to be different is my fault.

This future I had never wished for.

My brother, my brother-in-law and everyone else who knows him sing his praises. In Holland information was sought about the person who had made Kartini unfaithful to her convictions and the information that was gleaned was good. People in Holland heard only good things about him from all quarters.

How strangely, amazingly, life can unfold. It is really remarkable how he had felt drawn to my Father from the moment they met each other several years ago for the first time. Since then he had sought us out and Father and he have become firm friends. And it had been the wish of his poor wife to come with him and all their children to make our acquaintance. Both called my Father 'Father'.

Am I still going to get Edie's address?

I am happy that you like the frame. Just send the money to Roekmini, I have already paid for it.

Just imagine all the civil servants of this district have requested to be allowed to accompany me to the boundary of my new residence. I hope they will desist if I ask them to. It is very sweetly meant but that is not possible. Apart from the expense they would all have to be away for two days because they could not get there and back in one day.

And now, goodbye my dearest! Once again, many thanks. To you and your husband our warmest regards and for yourself a firm kiss from your daughter.

Kartini

Accompanying book list[141]

Tolstoy	Smiles
Ritter	Egerton
Vosmaer	Browning
Jonathan	Ward
Limburg Brouwer	Hamerling
Jacques Perk	Maeterlinck
Tegner	Eliot
Tennyson	Kipling
Harraden	

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

7 November 1903

My dearest Moedertje,

This is the last greeting from your daughter as young girl on the eve of her wedding day.

I have just spent several hours posing as a Buddha statue, have rather a headache from the strong perfume of the flowers.

We will be married tomorrow at 5:30. I know who will be with me with all her heart.

This morning I received the case from Eigen Hulp, unpacked it immediately.[142] Contents are wonderful, completely to my taste. Many, many thanks for that!

Goodbye my dearest, give your husband my warmest regards and be warmly embraced by your own daughter.

K

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141 The original provides no indication of what this list refers to, books Kartini already owned or books that were being promised. It is retained here as further indication of the range of reading with which Kartini was familiar. See the appendix for likely titles and publication dates.

142 This perhaps relates to the request for presents for the children.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri[143]

17 November 1903

8 Nov. passed very simply. Except for the fact that there was a reception and an evening for the Native officials, everything took place very calmly. Even the bridal couple was not in a bridal costume, as was the case when Kardinah was married. Kartini considered it would be ridiculous for her to have to present herself as a puppet and her husband declined because of his circumstances. They were therefore both formally dressed, Kartini wore a yellow silk kebaya set off with white embroidery and a silk kain woven with gold thread and very few decorations, although with many flowers, melati!

The wedding took place at half past five and was attended by the resident. At the formal introductions, that is when the bride and bridegroom were brought together, K did not offer her husband a foot kiss and, oh, what a murmur didn't that produce amongst the family, although it didn't go beyond that and K had her way: she did not have to bow. It was also a surprise to her husband. He had not expected this, being accustomed to the traditional practices being followed at such weddings but being liberal he quickly realized her intention and accepted it. He promptly offered her his arm after which, like two friends, they walked to their designated places. For both of us it was a moment we will never forget. We looked deeply into each other's eyes as she passed me and recognized in that look our farewell to the past.

On further acquaintance with our brother-in-law we became, as we expected, daily more impressed. He is a man with a spirit one can call sparkling. His knowledge of the world is extensive and apart from that has such broad sympathies that besides the enormous admiration one is forced to have for him, one also feels affection.

The evidence of his generous nature was most apparent when, together with his young wife, he returned to his administrative district. It was as if a royal couple was being welcomed. The whole town was decorated in green and there was not a kampong dwelling without a flag, they were even on the carts that served as hire vehicles. On the arrival of the couple at the station there was already a packed crowd that included the European inhabitants who, on seeing the two people who had been so eagerly awaited, joined in the loud 'hooray'. And during the ride to the kabupaten there was music of all kinds barely several paces removed from the common people who, as it were, formed an escort for the carriage. The Javanese welcomed the couple with gamelan, the Chinese with Chinese music, etc. etc. It was a terrible to-do.

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143 This is Roekmini's account of Kartini's wedding and subsequent festivities.

The following evening a ball was held at the kabupaten that lasted till 8 o'clock in the morning. The whole residency was in attendance and the resident who was in fact still unwell (he had a nasty fall and had been bedridden for the last 2 months) did not wish to let it pass without having attended, if only briefly. It was a nice gesture on his part. He proposed a toast to the couple of which the only thing we properly understood was that he was very pleased to see that a relationship had been established between one of the best regents of Java and the regent family from Jepara.

Kartini also received praise from the Regent, and from the younger brothers and sisters of her husband. He spoke on behalf of all the younger brothers and sisters of her husband. It had been such happy news for him when he learnt that she was to be the wife of their much loved brother and now that this had come to be their happiness knew no bounds. Having heard so many appreciative reports about her, about the kind of person she was, they did not want to regard her merely as a sister but as something higher, a mother, in the same way as their brother had always been a father to them. They would hold her up as an example to their wives and children and later, after a lapse of time, they would send their children to her to be educated. Then K. would have to reign over them, they would be left totally in her care.

What a reward for her struggle it was to hear those words, isn't it, Moedertje, that because of their deep appreciation of her, people would be prepared to do this. They follow her everywhere wherever she goes, including her husband. She cannot be separated from him for a moment without him looking for her. The little children are still shy with their Moedertje but they are already smiling at her from time to time. After a while they will probably be hugging her. The Regent of Pekalongan who was there as well, spoke similar words of admiration. He said that grandfather continues to be held up as an example to all regents and he hoped that now K. could become an example to all Regents' wives.

* * * *

Oh yes, Kardinah also visited with her husband. The child looks very pale but is well. How happy she was to be with the brood again after two years. She immediately became like a vine again, wrapping herself around the two of us. Her husband is a fine fellow, good-natured, almost superficial, but yet with a depth of feeling so that there is certainly some good in him. We get on very well with him. They stayed with us for 2 weeks.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang 11 December 1903

My dearest, kind friends,

As if I did not know with what expectation you were awaiting this, my first letter from my new home!

God be praised, a home in which in all aspects I am surrounded by kindness and love, where we are all contented with, and because of, each other.

How I regret that because of circumstances I am only now able to write to you. Forgive me, dears! The first days were so incredibly busy. After that our children were unwell and then there was my reaction to all these tiring days which we had gone through. I felt less than well and had to take care of myself. Now I am again full of energy and happy, once again the spirited thing of former times and looking towards the future with optimism.

Need I make myself clearer, my dears? I bless the day that I laid my hand in his – whom the Almighty has given me as my companion through this broad and often difficult life. I have not only come to respect him – I had done so before I was married – but I have also come to love him. In the short period of time that we have been together day and night, we have become part of each other's soul. I consider myself privileged above thousands of others to be allowed to stand in life beside such a noble man. He is someone who commands respect and admiration, whom one must hold in high regard.

I have met my equal – no, in many ways my superior. How small and insignificant I feel beside him. If all Regents perceived their duty and life in general as he then this island would be the most flourishing and the most prosperous in the whole world.

Everything that had been presented to me as being of beauty and refinement I see realized here. The dreams I am still dreaming were already put into practice years ago by him, or already thought of by him. When we are together I am moved so often by the fact that we are so much at one in our feelings, thoughts and ideas.

You will both come to like him when you get to know him, you will admire his clear-headedness and appreciate his sincere heart. This is how I had imagined that the aristocracy ought to be for its people, this is how I had wished the duties of the aristocracy to be understood. That is the direction our aristocracy must take, the king of my heart is showing the way.

12 Dec.

Today is exactly one month since my husband brought me here, brought me to his district, to his house, now our house.

The Queen could not have been more enthusiastically received. The whole of Rembang celebrated, from the border on, every house displayed a flag, even on the hire carts the three-coloured flag was waving. And the feeling of the people was so spontaneous, was so sincere, that expression of fondness arose so warmly from their hearts. The people were happy, joining in the celebrations because their Ruler was happy. Frequently my husband brought me out onto the balcony, the people had to see his new Gusti Putri.

I sat or stood silently beside him, my eyes moist and with a heart full of emotion. There was happiness, there was gratitude, there was pride and pride in him, that he had been able to secure such a warm place in the heart of the people, grateful that one great dream of mine had come to fruition, and happy that I was sitting there by his side.

In him I have an excellent leader and adviser for the work that I wish to pursue!

If I could now have two wishes then they would be that my soul sister Roekmini may become just as happy as me, and that you both could be witness to her and my happiness! If you could only see me as the young wife and mother whose happiness streams from her eyes and whose lips and pen cannot find sufficient words to declare her wealth.

He really has a heart of gold besides which mine is but slate, it is so cold and hard.

And our children! How can I tell you about these treasures? They are such dear, lovable things to which I was immediately attached. And they too are becoming more firmly attached to my heart. The father has laid a good basis, has raised them in a way I have always wished, with simplicity and humility. My precious ones do not consider themselves above the humblest member of the household, they consider everyone as equals. I have discovered that here the field has been prepared, I have only to sow.

By January I hope to be able to open our school. We are looking for a good teacher. Until we have one I will teach and should circumstances prevent me from doing so, then one of the sisters will take this on temporarily until such a time as I can do so again. There are already a few parents who have offered me their children to teach.

One of the teachers here will be leaving shortly, in several months' time already. Could I ask you a great favour? Please give us an excellent teacher! You would oblige us so much.

Our idea is that if we could get a good teacher we could open a school for daughters of Native officials at our house. My husband is very much against letting our children attend school in Rembang. There are bad elements amongst the children attending the school here and my husband is afraid of the influence that may have on ours.[144] If we could get an excellent governess then she could take responsibility for the intellectual development, and I could concern myself with their moral development.

If everything works well, could we then count on a government subsidy. The school fees would have to be kept as low as possible, board and lodging they would receive free from us.

Should I send a memorandum regarding this?[145]

The parents are full of trust and are asking. The opportunity has now to be provided – we must give it. Anyway I will write about it again at length. I strongly believe that a girls' school conducted here at home, under the direction of a European lady teacher, with me as director (!) would be successful.[146] My husband has such a good name and me they know.

The two of us have great plans. What would I not give for us to be able to discuss this in person with you.

I am writing at 4 o'clock in the morning. The children are awake and are hanging around my chair. Moeder has to give them bread and milk. You should see the youngest. He is not quite two years old but so intelligent. If I am sitting down he brings along a footstool, it is too heavy for him so he drags it to his mother. Moeder's feet must not hang. And then the sweet thing climbs up on my lap. If I am preparing something the children fight among themselves to see who is allowed to bring me this or that and our little Sis brings me lots of spoons and forks. Whoever is naughty is not allowed to be near Moeder.

They have the greatest fun when they bathe together with me and I even gain the greatest pleasure. It is such a joy to see those fresh, laughing faces.

And now, I have just been talking here about myself, I have not even thanked you for all the kindnesses we have received from you in recent days. How happy you both made me with your letters that we received in Jepara. Many, many thanks for those. And you, Moedertje dear, a kiss on both cheeks

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144 The reference is to a local government European elementary school for which the Regent's children would be eligible but which it was feared was attended by Eurasian children of questionable character, reflecting a typical attitude shared by both Javanese and Europeans.

145 Kartini is now an experienced writer of memoranda to the colonial government!

146 This plan, with Kartini as director of a girl's school, returns to the plan that Abendanon had proposed in August 1900, not her Jepara school model.

for your welcome greeting that I received here on my arrival. I was overjoyed by it! How touched I was when I read about the flowers that you so wanted to send to me as a welcome. I took pleasure in the idea alone. And how shall I thank you for the wonderful souvenir you gave us! It is something totally novel for us.

16 December

A great peace at last. A whole history has taken place, I could not continue my letter until it had passed.

You can never guess who we had to stay and who has just departed this morning: the Bervoets family from Mojowarno! They had been in Jepara visiting my Parents and they sent them here. It was a divine inspiration on the part of my Father. We bless this double chance that the path of their love brought angels in this direction.

I had so fervently wanted to meet this noble couple. My wish had been fulfilled but in what fashion? Where I had thought about this noble couple with admiration previously, this feeling is now mixed with deep gratitude.

The day before yesterday my husband had been active and cheerful all day. In the afternoon the Bervoets family arrived and they remarked on how cheerful my husband was, little expecting that several hours later he would be seriously ill. Gaily we took our leave from our guests at midnight; an hour later my husband became intensely unwell. The illness came suddenly and in 5 minutes my husband felt so unwell that he thought he would no longer be alive in the morning. You can imagine how I felt. I had Dr Bervoets woken. He had intended to leave in the morning at 8 o'clock but he and his wife did not have the heart to leave us on our own in such wretched circumstances. They then planned to leave at 1 o'clock, this they also postponed as my husband needed constant medical attention and our doctor was away on his rounds.

It was a severe attack of intestinal colic, an illness that my husband had never suffered from before in his life.

Yesterday afternoon some improvement was noticeable and my husband was able to sleep. You can imagine how thankful I was and how I blessed the good fortune that these dear angels were with us. This morning at 8 o'clock our dear friends departed. My husband is constantly improving only he is terribly weak. At the moment he is asleep and has been for a good half hour. God grant he may soon be totally recovered.

I have hardly had a moment to attend to my poor little children during these anxious days. A moment ago little Sis, that is the youngest son, came

looking for me in the sickroom. I told him he must keep very quiet because his father was ill. And the little fellow keeps as quiet as a mouse, he only wanted to sit on Moeder's lap and be caressed by her.

Our eldest son[147] is such a dear, hearty boy. He is always ready to attend on me. His Father told me that he was very fond of his Moedertje. How grateful I am for that and how very, very happy it makes me. He will do anything for his Moedertje. When earlier I was eating on my own he waited on me. It is really touching how he cares for his Moedertje. He also loves his father very much – and for that reason he is fond of me because I make him happy.

Everyone here is good to me and that was even more apparent when I was unwell.

It is strange, quite strange that right up to the end my husband's first wife constantly talked about me. She so longed to meet me, to become friends with me. Her dream had been to go to Jepara to bring me her children. My photograph literally was never out of her hands until the last moment she had it by her. And when she died and people recovered from their initial grief, everyone, including even the native Officials had but one wish – the one which since 8 Nov. has been fulfilled. It was for that reason that the joy was so widespread when we arrived. All those who knew him and were fond of him had selected me as the only one whom they wanted to see by his side.

My husband received your letter with great pleasure. The harness equipment for O en W has been ready for some time and has now been packed and, when my husband has recovered, it will be sent off.

My husband has also ordered an array of peacock feathers, cigar containers and we are also looking for real Lassem sarongs.[148] After that we will see what we can do for O en W. My husband thinks it is an excellent idea to have Jepara woodcarvers work here and will strongly support me in this and in other plans that I am keen to undertake. A technical school for Natives has long been a dream of his.

And now, may we thank you most sincerely for the wonderful momento. It sat proudly on the table when the Bervoets family stayed with us. We are so pleased with it.

And how moved and surprised we were by your children. I cannot tell you how kind we thought it was of Doppie and Mary. Doppie's nice clock is in our room and Mary's beautifully embroidered cushion is in the next room where we have our treasures, my husband has his sculptures and paintings here

147 That is, Kartini's stepson. Later he appears to have been instrumental in obstructing Roekmini's attempts to contact Kartini's son (see Coté 2008).

148 The reference is to Chinese-styled batik from the town of Lassem.

and I have my books. You should know that my husband is a great admirer of paintings and sculpture. Why do you two not come on over to see our treasures for yourselves but, in the first place, to make the acquaintance with my husband. Do you know that we speak Dutch together? He enjoys it. After December we will also speak Dutch with our children, that way they will get to know it quite quickly.

My husband would very much like me to write a book about the myths and legends of Java. He would collect them for me, we would then work on them together. A wonderful prospect! There is so much he wants to do together with me – on my writing desk there are already several things he has written.

Didi wrote me such a lovely letter, I was so pleased with it. Doppie and Mary also wrote me a warm and friendly letter! It touched me so deeply.

My husband grumbles that I still leave so many letters unanswered and then he gives me his correspondence as well!

How you will envy me when you see our roses here! Each morning I have a fresh bouquet of French and yellow roses! We can see the sea from our house, it is wonderful!

With this I am sending you the latest photographs of ourselves. What do you think of me as Raden Ayu? I still find it strange and stare at people when they call me 'Gusti'.[149] I have met so many people here, perhaps 400, of course I have forgotten their names. My husband thinks it is a good idea to meet the wives of Native officials on a fixed day and to be unavailable on other days except in the case of urgent matters. He dislikes superficial chatter.

And so dear friends, that is all. If I do not end soon then it will just stay here and you will have to wait even longer. Will you write to me soon, Moedertje? We will also send a photograph to Didi and Doppie.

Goodbye dearest. Once again many thanks for everything! I pass on heartiest greetings from my husband, for Vadertje[150] a firm hand and for Moedertje a warm kiss from your own daughter

Kartini

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149 The honorific for addressing the Raden Ayu.

150 This is the first time that Kartini applies the term 'vadertje', the diminutive equivalent of 'moedertje' in reference to Mijnheer Abendanon, perhaps in response to her own new status.

LETTERS 1904

Introduction

In the relatively few letters that have survived from this last year of her life, Kartini presents a generally positive view of her new circumstances. It has been suggested that, under the watchful eye of her husband, she could not have written other than positively. Such an interpretation would support an interpretation that Kartini entered the marriage against her will.

Correspondence from the moment the betrothal is announced till her last letter of September 1904 is almost exclusively to Rosa who – or at least whose husband – supported the idea of her marriage. Stella admitted receiving letters from Kartini during this period that suggested another version of her state of mind but Stella is known to have refused to provide Abendanon with many of the letters she had received. Responding to his request in 1909 she had replied:

> In total I have 25 letters and several postcards … In rereading the letters I have developed some doubts whether it is right that I should give them to you for publication as they contain much the suitability of which I would first like to discuss with you. She was always so scrupulously honest in expressing her views to me naturally never considering publication.[1]

The fact that letters to Stella are conspicuously absent after June 1903 suggests the ones she withheld are likely have been from this time. When interviewed a half-century after these events by H Bouman, who was proposing to write a biography of Kartini (a project he concluded was impossible), she expressed her suspicions regarding Kartini's last letters to Rosa:

> I also received a letter from Roekmini but she didn't mention a word concerning K.'s happiness [regarding her impending marriage]; to the contrary she wrote only about the suffering and disappointment which she [Kartini] had confessed to me. You know that before her marriage I wrote a very long letter in which I strongly argued against it; I wrote that letter in consultation with the unfortunately now deceased Mr van Overveldt [socialist MP) and her brother [Kartono]. I also wrote along these lines to the Regent [Kartini's father].

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1 KITLV archive, H 897:250, Stella to Abendanon 29 September 1909.

> And regardless of R[oekmini]'s insistence to you [ie in the 1950s] that K. was happy, I will never believe it. Why would K. not have written that herself? I wished I could believe it, but for me that is impossible.[2]

There seems, then, little possibility of examining evidence that might document any contrasting versions that she may have communicated to others. On the other hand, it might be possible for the doubting reader to interpret the following statements in early letters to Rosa Abendanon as carefully coded references to what could not be committed to paper. Rosa had paid Kartini a surprise visit in Rembang (having not attended the wedding in Jepara) and, assuming the intervening eyes of a suspicious husband, the following statements that Kartini underlined in the quotations below, could be taken as hints of a darker side of her life in Rembang:

> It must have seemed so ungrateful that I thanked neither you nor your husband for everything that you had done for me last year. Can you understand that I was <u>not</u> able to? That past is not yet so far behind me, I had dedicated my life to it…

> No, I was not able to speak to you about it. You who had occupied such a large place in that past. <u>We understand each other without words, do we not, Moedertje</u>? (17 April)

> But do you hold it against your daughter that instead of these mountains of letters you have not even received the thinnest of letters? <u>You have been able to peer into her new life and surroundings: could there possibly be much time left for correspondence?</u> (8 June)

Taken at their face value, the letters from 1904, in particular for example, the letter to the Antons, (are intended to) suggest a happy, newly married woman. They continue to emphasize and develop the themes that had been central to Kartini's earlier correspondence. These include, firstly, the development of a schoolroom, which unfortunately she had little chance to develop due to on-going illness, and to the ambitious plans to establish a craft centre, which was also a longer-term project she was unable to realize. Significantly, Kartini returned to a feminist text that had so clearly inspired her initially, to 'recalibrate' her future position when she imagines herself as: 'something out of *Hilda van Suylenberg*: a mother out working with a child at her breast.'

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[2] Stella's letter is cited in Bouman to Nieuwenhuis 18 July 1954, KITLV Kartini archive 1200, 25.

Not least, also, was Kartini's expressed admiration for the achievements of her husband and his effective governance of his region which embodied her previously declared beliefs regarding the moral responsibilities of the Javanese nobility. On all these levels Kartini was able to convince herself that the new turn in her life was not a negation of what had gone before and to confirm the eminent rationality of the marriage that her father (and various colonial and Javanese intermediaries) had arranged for her.

Importantly also, in this correspondence Kartini returns to themes she had initially broached with Stella and expressed to Rosa on several occasions when she had attempted to intercede on behalf of her brothers in relation to their treatment by the colonial administration. Now closer to 'the action' than her father had allowed her, Kartini reflected more directly the anger that Javanese leaders, even those who were the bureaucracy's favourites, directed at the policies and practices of the colonial government. Whether, then, the extant letters Kartini wrote from Rembang expressed her real feelings – which Stella specifically doubted – remains a moot point but there can be little doubt that at an intellectual level Kartini had committed to a new life in which she saw the possibility of actively working for the goals she had defined for Java's advancement. As her sister Kardinah was also to demonstrate – and as Kartini herself acknowledged – the position of a *modern* Raden Ayu could be successfully exploited to achieve significant social advances, particularly in an 'ethical' age where the possibility existed of support from interested and influential Europeans.

The correspondence ends with a letter relating the circumstances of her death which have remained a matter of controversy over the past century. Written by the Dutch-educated RMAA Djojo Adiningrat, it succinctly describes the circumstances of Kartini's last hours soon after the event. Appended to it is part of a letter a local colonial official, assistant resident GL Gonggrijp, had written some weeks afterwards.

Theories to explain the sudden death of Kartini have ranged from a conspiracy on the part of the regent's jealous co-wives to poison her, to the incompetence of the attending doctor. Bouman who attempted a biography of Kartini in the early 1950s and interviewed a number of contemporaries reported he was unable to come to a definite conclusion regarding the latter theory, citing a number of directly contradictory opinions of Dr Ravenstijn's competence. The poisoning theory suggests the widely held view to which Kartini herself had referred when reporting on her sister Kardinah's marriage (22 April 1902). Kartini recounts that her sister was warned not to eat anything prepared by 'the other', giving substance to the belief that jealous co-wives – and the Regent

of Rembang had four – often attempted to poison a new young Raden Ayu who replaced them in their position in the household. Kartini herself refers to the 'slander' that circulated in Rembang about her (8 June), indicative of the hostile atmosphere that she had entered generated by the 'competing wives'.

More recently it has come to be accepted that Kartini, after suffering numerous bouts of ill health during her pregnancy, died, like so many other women in her day and since, following childbirth from a postnatal complications such as eclampsia. Gonggrijp, who hurriedly organized an overnight journey from Jepara to Rembang when the news reached him, to bring Kartini's sisters to the funeral the following morning, believed that Kartini may have died of a heart attack. Having known Kartini since 1900 (as controleur and later assistant resident of Jepara) and having worked closely with RMAA Djojo Adiningrat since the Regent's appointment in 1891 (as controleur of Rembang) apparently saw no reason for suspicion. Roekmini echoed this diagnosis noting both that the baby was abnormally large and Kartini's evident physical weakness.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 6 March 1904

My dearest, my own Moedertje,

How shamefully I have mistreated you. Two letters of yours have already been waiting several months for a reply. Oh Moedertje, your daughter has become terribly lazy! Moeder, my Moeder can you forgive your daughter?

Oh, if I could but throw my arms around your neck now, how very much I would like to tell you, heart to heart, of my happiness, to let you share our wonderful secret. A great, sweet treasure awaits me.

God willing, towards the end of September a gift from God will come to make our beautiful lives still more beautiful, will draw the bonds which bind us together, still stronger, closer. Moeder, my Moeder, imagine how I feel now that soon a little soul will be born from the union of our two souls, who will call me Moeder.

It is such a sweet feeling for me to think that soon I will stand in even more intimate relation to the little beings whom I love. I will be even closer to them now that I will become a mother to a little one that is of their flesh and blood.

Can you imagine? Me – a mother-to-be! I am making you old, Moedertje … I am making you a grandmother! Will you come and visit your granddaughter later? I will not be able to come to Batavia now. Our plan had been to travel this month on a month's leave but now that has had to be changed. I

am not allowed to travel in the first months. And when our child has arrived then I also will not be able to travel. So I will not see Batavia again – at least not while you are there. And what value is it to me if you two are no longer there? My husband is so extremely happy with this new life I am carrying under my heart.

There is only one thing lacking till now in our happiness. He continues to adore me, as do all others who surround me. Moedertje, I would very much like you to meet him, to get to know him as I know him.

Now I want to tell you something that will no doubt make you very happy. I have given in to the daily repeated pleadings of my husband. He was so happy when you advised me against vegetarianism. I am no longer vegetarian. I have changed for my husband's sake but especially also for the sake of my child. Since January I have been suffering from ill-health which is why I did not write to you. Recently I have improved but I have not wholly recovered. The doctor is not able to prescribe anything now because of the baby.

Ma and Father have stayed here – wonderful! The sisters stayed behind with me when they left, they have to leave again tomorrow, unfortunately! But the days that have just passed have been heavenly. The children are so happy since they have heard that they will soon get a nephew from me.

It will be a long time, Moedertje, before you will again receive letters from R and me together as in the old days. I still miss her and will miss her again when she returns home tomorrow. But for several days we have been very happy together, let us be thankful for that.

And dearest Moes, how are you both? Are you both well? Sometimes I long for you so and then I will stare at the heart of gold on my finger, that wonderful ring that I wear.

And how are Didi and Doppie and Mary and John? Is Didi still in China? Moedertje, please write me soon, soon. I so long to hear from you!

Imagine, I received here the letter that Mijnheer wrote to me on 11 August. It has travelled to Japan, China, India and the Middle East.

I cannot write any longer, I am already so tired. These days I become exhausted so quickly and I must not allow myself to become too tired.

Oh yes, the reins will be sent soon and send the accompanying account to O en W.

Goodbye dearest! Give your husband our kindest regards. Think of me, pray for me and kiss me in your thoughts as I do thinking of you. Goodbye, dearest beloved, goodbye!

Your own daughter,
Kartini

Goodbye dearest, also warm greetings from me here! I cannot write you much. Being with my sisters makes me incapable of this. With my love

R[oekmini]

To Mijnheer and Mevrouw Anton

Rembang, 10 April 1904

Highly Esteemed Friends,

How strange you must think that you have heard nothing from me in response to your hearty letters and the beautiful present with which we were so extremely happy with. If every thought that I devoted to you both was actually put in writing then you would already have had heaps of letters from me. Do forgive, dear friends that this has not already reached you much, much earlier. The transition from a young girl to married partner, mother, and wife of a highly placed official – which means a lot in our Indies society – is so great that at the beginning I could think of nothing else but to do my best to fulfil my new duties.

And not only that – I had to also survive another test. Soon after our wedding my husband suddenly fell seriously ill. He had cholera – or rather cholera had taken hold of him. Even days later he was still unwell. After that I myself became poorly. Up until now I am still not accustomed to the climate in Rembang. We living close to the sea but, whereas in Jepara it was a great treat, here in Rembang it is a problem. Here we have to be careful about the wind which passes over a coral reef and mud before it reaches us.

But let me first, thank you both very much, also on behalf of my husband, for the beautiful, expensive souvenir that you presented us with on the occasion of our wedding.

It is particularly dear to me because it portrays the famous Thüring Forest about which you had told me so much and where my dear German friends loved to go. That beautiful painting and the fine photograph of Jena are hanging in our sitting room where my husband, a great admirer of beautiful paintings and sculptures, displays his treasurers. I often look at them with great pleasure, and then countless thoughts of gratitude fly to my friends in Jena. How very, very sweet of you to think of sending me a boomkoek, the national German cake which must not be lacking at any festive occasion in your country. Although you could not realize this idea, it was for me no less: I appreciate it just as much as if you had done so.

How are you both? I hope that this finds you both in good health. No doubt your sons are now going to school. And your daughter, how is she going? Oh please, may I have a photograph of you all? The one that you sent me before I have with me in my new home – I will send you a portrait of us two.

And now I am going to tell you about my new rich life: I am sure you are keen to know about it, aren't you? You had always expressed such interest in the lives of your Javanese friends about whose future you had, at the time, been so concerned.

Thank goodness what we feared has proven to be groundless. After all, these lines are being written to you by a young wife whose eyes shine with happiness and who has no words enough to jubilantly declare her good fortune!

And my husband – why would he have taken me otherwise since it was known throughout Java that I was different from others; and why would I otherwise have bound myself to him? – is not just my husband but my soulmate. Everything that I had thought about, he has also and much of it he has been able to realize. I had imagined a rich life for myself as a pioneer for the rights and freedom of the Javanese woman – now as the wife of a high-ranking man in whom I have a powerful support to achieve the ideals which have always been my focus. I have both: a rich and a full life. I know that you will be pleased to hear this. This little Javanese friend of yours with her restless spirit has thus safely entered the harbour. I wish you could see me in my new surroundings.

You know how little I care for wealth and social position. They would mean nothing to me if it were not my husband who gave them to me. Now they are for me a means to better achieve my goals

The Javanese people are very attached to their nobility, everything that comes from their leaders is readily accepted. So now, at the side of my husband, I will be able to reach the hearts of our people more easily. I will continue to carry out our plans for schooling and education even though I am married.

We had already begun this work at home and now my younger sisters will continue it. Our school in Jepara now numbers twenty-two pupils, daughters of native officials. The sisters undertake the teaching. I have also begun this work here, my own daughters are my first pupils.[3] And so in this way the little Javanese have been able to bring to reality the dream they had as young girls.

I am writing this letter on my knee, my husband is doing his work. By the time he is finished our little ones will have been bathed and then the time will

[3] The reference is to her new stepdaughters.

be for us all together. It is so wonderful, a house full of children's voices. Every now and then I hear a little voice calling: 'Where is mama?'

But now I have to end but not before I thanks you once again for your nice present. Goodbye my dear friends. Please accept the heartiest greetings from your little Javanese and her husband

In warm friendship
Your
Kartini.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 17 April 1904

My own dearest Moedertje,

It is as if I have been dreaming, meeting you again! Who could have thought that we would meet each other again here in Rembang! There was so much I had wanted to tell you but when I saw you and spoke with you I could think of nothing else than how wonderful it was to have you, my beloved, here with me! How I envied my sisters who were able to profit from your company so much longer!

And yet I am grateful that I have been able to have you for a few hours. You do not know how good it was for me to see you again! I will always remember it, always, with love and gratitude!

And are you yourself satisfied now that you have seen me in my new surroundings? You will no doubt have missed some things but be glad you did not miss a lot more. It must have seemed so ungrateful that I thanked neither you nor your husband for everything that you had done for me last year. Can you understand that I was <u>not</u> able to? That past is not yet so far behind me, I had dedicated my life to it…

No, I was not able to speak to you about it. You who had occupied such a large place in that past. We understand each other without words, do we not, Moedertje?

And now regarding something else. After your departure my husband has had people searching for your necklace and it has been found buried in the sand. I am returning it to you with this.

Goodbye, my dearest Moedertje! I am following you both everywhere in my thoughts. My husband sends you and Mijnheer his regards and a hearty kiss from your own daughter,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 8 June 1904

My dearest Moedertje,

If every thought of you was acted upon what mountains of letters you would have received from me by now. But do you hold it against your daughter that instead of these mountains of letters you have not even received the thinnest of letters? You have been able to peer into her new life and surroundings: could there possibly be much time left for correspondence?

And this, even though we engage so little in conventional duties? We do not go out and rarely receive guests and yet my life is constantly filled. Wonderful, wonderful.

I divide my days between my dear husband, my housework and my children, my own and my adopted. And they, in fact, take up the largest part of my day. When Father goes off to work then the children work with me until about twelve o'clock. At half past twelve Father finds a troop of freshly washed but very hungry little children. At half past one this young crowd is led off to bed and when Father has also gone to bed and if I am not too tired then I work with the young girls. At 4 o'clock I attend to tea. When the children have drunk their milk and have been bathed they are allowed to herd the poultry into their pens, go for a stroll with us or play in the garden. We may then sit and relax for a while and talk about this and that. When our little troop come back inside then it is the end of our relaxation. Father reads the paper and my little ones gather themselves around their mother. I sit in an armchair, the two youngest ones on my lap, a child on each arm of the chair and at my knee the oldest. We play games or tell stories. We do this until dinner-time. We eat early because of the little ones. The very youngest sits next to mother. This little fellow has given himself the task of lifting off the cover from mother's glass and replacing it. No one may take this task from him. And should he ever not be allowed to do this then he knows that he has deserved that punishment.

At eight o'clock the little ones are taken to bed. And we parents then sit side by side talking, discussing all sorts of things, until quite often Klaas also chases us off to Puluh Kapok[4] and this is now no longer as late as it was in Jepara but early. But then we get up very early.[5]

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4 Klaas (Sleep); Puluh Kapok (lit. Capok Island): in other words, we go to bed.

5 This passage effectively described the typical day for a regional colonial official, Javanese or European.

Sunday is a free day for us both which we begin very early with a walk. After breakfast I teach the girls about cooking and then Moeder, the woman may do those things that she is unable to do during the week. This is not much because my husband finds it more pleasant if I sit with him. He then treats me to beautiful gamelan music accompanied by singing. I like to sit with my husband at these times, only the gamelan has too great an influence on me. It carries me back to times that I may no longer think about. It makes me weak and melancholy.

And in this way my days fly past, peacefully, calmly, restfully as a brook deep in the forest, extending a calm and peaceful influence on all who encounter it.

If the child that I carry under my heart should be a girl what would I then wish for her? I would wish that she may live (!) a rich, full life. That the life her mother began she may fulfil. That she will not be made to do anything against her innermost feelings. What she will do she will do of her own free will. She will have a mother who will guard over her spiritual welfare and a father who will not force her to do anything. For him it will make no difference should his daughter never marry. What he values is that she will always retain our respect. That he respects women such as I hope my daughter will become he has shown me in marrying me.

Oh, if you only knew what slander has been spread about me. What reached my ears before my marriage was high praise compared to that which I have come to hear since. My husband must have had courage to offer his hand, his heart, his name to a girl so widely despised, about whom the most scandalous stories were circulating. He had never believed a word of what had been said about me, in his heart there was a conviction that no one could shake and that was: that we were the carriers of new ideas not comprehended by the masses who therefore were stoning us. When he had first begun defending us, when our name was being dragged through the mire, his first wife was still alive. She had been so eager to meet me that in her final hours she slept with my photograph in her hand. And he felt that I would play a large part in his life. And everyone here at home looked forward to my coming. There were therefore premonitions, secret desires, that appear to have been the harbingers of what was to happen in the future. Only I never thought, never dreamed, that this would be my future!

I am not giving my little ones a holiday, this they will not get till September when my child arrives. In the first 14 days I will need my rest. And then my child will be brought into the schoolroom. I have already prepared a corner for the little one where it can sleep when Moeder is teaching its brothers and

sisters. That will be something out of *Hilda van Suylenberg*: a mother out working with a child at her breast.[6]

Oh, how I have been talking constantly about us. Forgive me!

How are you both? Has the cool air been good for you both? How I would love to fly over to see for myself what that long trip away has done for you both, whether Sindananglaja[7] has drained all the tiredness from you. There is now no longer any chance of us ever coming to Batavia. Even if there was no child to prevent me from doing so. For as long as my husband is in the civil service he wants to avoid any suggestion of appearing to be seeking favours. He is too proud for that. And journeys to Batavia are always interpreted in that way. It was not so long ago, about the time promotions were due, a Regent travelled to Batavia to kiss the feet of the G.G. and of the members of the Council of the Indies to seek the title of Adipati. As Regent my husband will only come to Batavia when he is directed to by the authorities.[8]

Oh Moeske! In Batavia one hears much but inland where we are, where people quite literally live behind the screen, one sees everything. And the most scandalous things happen. For the slightest misdeed we Javanese are persecuted and criticized, the greatest criminals are allowed to go free, one raises one's hat to them, and we have to approach them on our knees.

But enough of that. I described to you recently how my husband had fought mortally with someone who had a big name and who had the fullest confidence of the government.[9] And there are more like that one.

I regret that I am unable to send you the sleeping bag, I am unable to get hold of them, at least not for the price of *f*12. They do exist but they are so awful my husband did not want me to send them to you. So I have sent you 12 slippers at 75 cents each = *f*9 and 3 sarong Lassem[10] at *f*12 each = *f*36 plus postage of *f*1:40 making a total of *f*46.40.

And would you be so kind as to remind Oost en West that we have not yet received the *f*33 for the bridles. Your sarong is being made. When I have some

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6 This final reference to the book which, as she reported to Stella she had read three times, allowed Kartini to interpret her new role as wife and mother in reassuringly feminist terms, albeit in a more conservative interpretation than in 1899.

7 Sindananglaja, a mountain resort near Buitenzorg (Bogor), was also the location of the country house of the Governor General and a horticultural research station.

8 As in the case of her brothers and brother-in-law, this comment suggests the deep suspicion amongst the Javanese elite of the colonial bureaucracy.

9 This is not referred to in correspondence – presumably the reference is to conversations when Rosa Abendanon visited Rembang.

10 That is, a sarong from the town of Lassem, one of the centres of Chinese batik manufacturing. The slippers also may have been Chinese style. Both were popular with colonial European and Eurasian women.

things ready I will send it to you immediately. What should I do about the sleeping bags? If you want them for *f*4 or *f*3 I will send them to you. My husband has a fine cigar box made of silver – native craftwork. Shall I send one to you?

Now my dearest Moeske, adieu! To you and your husband our warmest regards and for you a firm kiss on both cheeks from your devoted daughter,

Kartini.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 30 June 1904

My dearest Moedertje,

Just a few words to thank you for the postal note for *f*46:50 and to inform you that the slippers and kain have been sent by parcel post to your postal address in Batavia. I hope you will receive them in good order when you return to Batavia. Will you let me know? Otherwise we could enquire at the postal service here.

I have been looking for sleeping bags for you. I hope to be able to send them to you in a week or so together with the sarongs which I had made for O en W and which you had seen here as batik work.

It is a great pity you cannot take the coolness of Sindanglalija with you to Batavia. Grant that Mijnheer may remain in good health in Batavia. It worries me so often and it makes me so sad to think how that terribly busy, nerve-wracking life wears you down. Oh, may you both be able to keep going until the spring of 1905 brings you both rest![11] It is a sad thought and it makes me so melancholy to think that next year you will no longer be in our country. But I can be happy for your sake and for you I think it is marvellous – not being in Java will mean you leave behind that busy, anxiety-ridden life.

Your previous letter I received in good order and I will of course provide you with clarification but I cannot do so at the moment. These last days I have felt less than well. I spent the entire previous week on the sofa; walking and sitting affected me. Last night I again had a terrible night. Today I am feeling down but I do not want to make you wait for news.

When will I again be able to correspond with you regularly as before? I am being reproached from all quarters for being such a poor correspondent. Yesterday I received another reproach from Kartono. But I cannot do otherwise.

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[11] Already aware that the Abendanons were planning to return to the Netherlands – and his imminent retirement – this is the first intimation of a specific time.

I have taken on a big task and it is now my bounden duty to fulfil it. The children are working well and I now have 12, amongst whom are also several adults.

And now, goodbye my dearest. As soon as I feel better I will write to you and then I will tell you about the many things which fill us with disgust but which nevertheless have happened in our society.

Give our warmest regards to Mijnheer and for you I enclose much love and with a warm embrace I remain your own daughter,

Kartini.

I am at the moment engaged in making an outfit for your future grandchild. The sisters are longing for a girl – my husband a son. If it is a daughter then I will love her doubly because everyone here is wanting a boy.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 17 July 1904

My own dearest Moedertje,

Do not measure my love for you, my involvement in everything that concerns you and yours, by the length and quantity of my letters. With the best will in the world it is not possible for me at the moment to write much or often to anyone. Especially not now that I am suffering ill health.

I have been very ill, caught a cold and have suffered much. Thank God that has now passed! But I still have to be very careful. Oh and I must, I will be healthy for the sake of the child. What demands a child makes on its Moeder. All this ill health is due to it.

Oh Moeske! I have to take such care, have to be so careful with everything. For the last month I have only been receiving family who then visit me in my room. I am writing this lying down on the daybed, I still find sitting up difficult. Mama was with me last week. Nothing was too much for that dear when it concerns the welfare of her children. She had just come from Pemalang where Kardinah had been very ill and she immediately prepared herself to come here when my husband telegraphed her in his desperation in seeing me in such a wretched condition.

My dear husband is dreading the forthcoming event. He cannot bear to see me suffer. Poor dear, spiritually he suffered more than me when I was so ill. He would have liked to turn the whole world upside down if it would have helped to spare me pain and suffering.

And with all these periods of ill health I have not been able to do anything about the sleeping bags, unfortunately! I can only send you 2 sarongs that are

being posted together with this letter. They are sarongs which I have had made for O en W, the cost of which is *f*10 each. Should you not like them then feel free to return them to me, no one will be affected, they belong to me. The sleeping bags will be sent later.

How are things with you, dearest? You have returned to Batavia, haven't you? And have the articles about the resurgence of native industries been sent to Holland yet?[12]

Recently I received fine photographs of Doppie and Mary. Have you been getting good news from them and your other children? I would so much like to write to Didi, I would love to receive something from him before September. You will also get a letter from me before then. And if I remain as well as I feel today then you may soon receive another.

At the moment I am home alone with the children. This morning my husband left for a week to Blitar to visit his old father who has been very ill recently. I had so much wanted to go to meet that fine, dear man but of course that is not possible.

Now I have to end again, dearest, I am so tired! We send you and Mijnheer our warmest regards and in your thoughts be warmly embraced by your own daughter,

Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 10 August 1904

My dearest Moeske,

This has been the first and I hope the last time since I have known you that I was not one of the long list of those who, with all their heart, sent you the warmest greetings on 1 Aug. And yet I had not forgotten that day. I remembered it in silence and love and friendship. It was unfortunately not possible for me to do more!

It was again ill health that prevented me from following the dearest wish of my heart. I had so much wanted to send you a greeting, a sign, that I was spending the day with you in thoughts, that I was praying for you and wishing you well.

I did not have a specific illness but on the other hand I was not totally well. For some time the nights have been terrible for me. Whatever I do I am

[12] This may have been a reference to Abendanon's report on stimulating native industries, which was rejected by the colonial government.

unable to sleep. And every night it is the same, tossing and turning, sitting up, walking, until morning. You can then imagine that the following day I am exhausted and have neither the desire nor the energy to do anything. Lying down teaching children is all I do.

There is nothing to be done about it, it is part of my condition, everyone with whom I discuss it tells me. In the 8th month the child is always very active, it is finding its way downwards. When the 9th month commences it descends and it will remain quiet until the moment arrives that it leaves the mother's womb. If that is correct I will soon have peace again. It is amazing how active my child is, it never gives me a moment's peace.[13]

A few days ago my hands and feet had become swollen, now they have gone down again. Otherwise I would still not be able to write to you. Moeske dearest, I had to think of you so much, especially in the last few days. And each time I think of you a soft, tender feeling comes over me and yet at the same time a deep melancholy. Melancholy because you are so far from me and soon unreachably far from me.

How my soul suffers at the thought that I will never see you again. Why must it be that exactly those souls which have an affinity for each other find themselves unreachably far from each other?

I become so sad if I think of you too much. At those times I just sit and stare straight ahead, neither see nor hear what is going on around me. I exist, I live in the past, that sweet and bitter past, where I so gladly spend time and through which your love is woven like a wreath of light. I suffer and I delight. My heart is full of melancholy but besides, also of deep gratitude – gratitude for the sweet happiness that your love has given me.

I could never sufficiently thank God that he brought you to us.

My husband is also full of admiration for his wife's spiritual mother. And he has such respect for your husband that he wished the Indies had more of such superior people. What a blessing that would be for our country.[14] That is someone, he often says, to whom everyone should show their respect. And his admiration and respect have increased since he obtained a printed report about the resurgence in native industry.[15] He has not been able to stop talking

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13 This is a notable display of scientific knowledge that Kartini had gleaned from her earlier interest in and study of midwifery.

14 These sentiments from a leading Javanese regent reflect the thinking of this generation that saw the possibility of a Javanese revival in 'association' with reform-minded Europeans.

15 Abendanon's lengthy report recommending the development of indigenous arts and crafts as a basis for reviving the Javanese economy was rejected by those favouring greater European industrialization and limited expansion of education as the basis for employing a greater native workforce.

about it. 'What an energy, what a zest for work and clear vision!' And with a sigh he compares it to the 'Commission on the Decline of Welfare' that needed 2 years to put together a confused set of guidelines, cost the country a fortune, creates a great deal of work for officials, especially Native officials, and as a result of which the people remain as hungry as before.[16] Have you seen the statement of policy? My husband gave it to me to study (it gave me a terrible headache). It contains +/- 600 questions for which it allows one year to provide the answers.

It asks: 'Why have the Javanese become so impoverished?' And those who ask this question at the same time wear themselves out wondering how they can get hold of more money. And who has to pay? Of course the common man, about whose welfare and existence so much concern is expended that an expensive commission is appointed to investigate the causes of his declining welfare.

'Why have the Javanese become so impoverished?' Meanwhile the grass cutters who earn 10 to 20 cents a day are hit with a business tax. For each goat or sheep that is slaughtered 20 cents tax has to be paid. In this way a sate seller, who slaughters 2 sheep a day, must pay *f* 144 per year in tax. And what is his profit? – enough to live on.

One day my husband returned home extremely agitated and indignant. 'Just imagine what a scandal. They want to place a tax on bat manure!' The small amount of manure that the common man obtains to fertilize his field they want to take away from him. And then, as if this amounted to a lot. But were they to put it all together and sell it, it would not even raise a thousand guilders. And that they now have to share with the Government! My husband did not leave it at that but sent in a sharp memorandum to the Resident with the consequence that the little farmer is at least allowed to retain that small amount of fertilizer.

Several years ago when the opium monopoly was going to be introduced and Government officials came here to discuss it, my husband asked what actually the government's objective was with this regulation. He was told it was to discourage the use of opium amongst the native population.

'Is that really the intention? Does the Government really want to dissuade the native people from using opium?' my husband asked again. Yes it was seriously intended. Now, if that was so my husband knew of a simple method

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16 The Mindere Welvaart Commissie, an official enquiry into the declining welfare in Java, was mooted by the new Dutch parliament in 1901. Commenced in 1904 it did not complete its study till 1914. Kartini's sister Soematri and her husband were amongst its Javanese witnesses.

that at the same time would not cost the Government anything. And he offered to take upon himself the responsibility to end the use of opium in his regency in a few years.

But what was the reply from a member of the Council of the Indies? 'Regent, you are in too much of a hurry, don't forget the Government itself is still in need of the money.'

So you see, it is not the Native population but the Government that cannot do without the opium. It is bitter but true; the curse of the Javanese is the life blood of the government. Why this fencing with words? Why is it being suggested that it is its serious desire to free the Javanese from the curse of opium?

At home with my parents I was aware of many things but here, where my husband shares every thought with me, where I completely share his life, his work, his endeavours, I have come to know so much more which I had not known before, or even guessed existed. There is so much outrageous injustice and anyone who is a just and upright person must suffer as an official. He must see so much and also do so many things that offend a sense of justice.

He had longed to be a Regent because he thought that in that way he would be able to do a great deal – everything – for his people. But what he is able to do is so relatively little.[17]

Oh, Moeske! I wish I could show you here in person everything my husband has done for the people who have been entrusted to him. It is not that I want to show off about it but I would very much wish that you knew that I have not given myself to an unworthy person. Ask my sisters – they know my husband is worthy of my love and respect, totally.

When the post at Semarang was available my husband would have dearly liked it; he very much wanted to see what was mightier: justice or money. Here he has come to know the situation, has been able to defeat the power of money. Rembang used to be a nest bed of smuggling – that has now come to an end.

They threatened his life when he just arrived. Had they been able to they would have disposed of him. And they had so often tried to buy him off, even just before I arrived. My husband dares to look everyone in the eye, he is not under the influence of the money or under orders of the Chinese. That is why he would have been pleased to be posted to Semarang. He is

[17] It is clear from this iteration of grievances that it formed the basis of a growing opposition even – or especially – amongst Javanese regents closest to the colonial regime and was to give rise to the first of a number of nationalist institutions barely four years later, Budi Utomo.

no longer so taken by Rembang now that he has hardly anything left to do here. Now he would very much like to come to a bigger place, such as Surabaya, or otherwise to a lovely climate such as that of Magelang, but at any rate a capital. He does not want to serve under an Assistant Resident. Those gentlemen still have to climb up higher and often the Native rulers act as ladders for them. The crimes of those rulers that they uncover adds to their reputation. It is often said of them: 'What a courageous, go-ahead official.'

Oh, if one could only peer behind the screens! How often is it not the case that a Native ruler has fallen for private reasons.

But enough of this. I would be happy if my husband could get Surabaya or Magelang. Our children would then be able to receive excellent education without us having to send them out of home. It pains me so to have to send them away. In whose care would they be? So often character suffers as a consequence and to some extent they become estranged from us. [18]

After all this I have still not even asked how you are! Forgiveness, dearest. Even without saying it, dearest, you know that I am deeply interested in your affairs and no less in the state of health of you and your husband. When I think of you both then it is always with a silent prayer in my heart: oh, may those dear, fine people enjoy excellent health!

Did you receive my letter and the two sarongs that I sent you on the 17th of July?

The outfit for the little one is almost ready. I myself made very few things because grandma from Jepara sent everything. The little bed is already waiting in the guest room – a dreadful wooden thing – but dear to me because we all slept in it, even Grandmama's oldest, that is, the oldest brother of my father. It is, therefore, an heirloom that has a history.

What will be sleeping in it in several weeks' time, a boy or a girl? My sisters have ordered a girl but here at home they are all asking for a boy. My husband is content with either as long as the two of us are well.

Bye Moeske, perhaps this is my last letter to you! Think constantly about your daughter who loves you both so much. Give Mijnheer our warmest regards and I hold you tightly to my heart, your own daughter,

Kartini.

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[18] These comments could be seen as an indirect appeal to Abendanon to help her husband gain a new appointment.

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 24 August 1904

Dearest Moedertje of mine,

So it was not to be that the letter you recently received from me was the last. I was afraid it might have been but perhaps this one will be because my time is nearing rapidly. I feel it, Moedertje. Most likely your granddaughter will come sooner than we first expected.

I am so grateful that I have been in good health these last days. Now I am still able to talk to my Moedertje and even thank her for the letter which I received recently and also for the postal note which was *f*5 too much. Those two sarongs cost *f*20 not *f*25. I will keep the extra amount with me and settle it with you later when I send the sleeping bags.

How are things with you both at the moment, dearest? Roekmini had no glad tidings about you when she wrote and of course I cannot stop thinking about it. I had first to write to you myself and hear from you yourself how you both were. God grant that you can send me better tidings than you sent to Roekmini.

The weather, the climate, here at the moment is so terrible; everywhere people are ill. I often think of you both with anxiety: 'How will they cope in this weather, they with all their burdens?'

I also received bad news from home. Mama is still ill. Poor mother, to be ill and then to be worrying. Ma worries terribly about me – what if she cannot be with me in the anxious hours which lie ahead of me? That is another reason why I am so glad that I am now feeling well and strong. That is so reassuring for the loved ones at home.

Others are also concerned about me but I myself feel nothing, am neither anxious nor concerned.

Just recently something terrible happened here locally. A daughter of a Regent who married the same week as we did was brought home by her parents to await the birth of her child under the watchful eyes of her mother. The child arrived prematurely and was dead. The mother had barely recovered when she caught small pox very severely.

Poor life, so young and already broken.

25 August 1904

As full of life as I felt yesterday, so down I feel now. I had so looked forward to having a long chat with you and now I will have to end quickly if I still want to send this letter. Last night I was again unwell. I had such a pain in my body that we thought my hour had come. But this will now no longer be far off.

Goodbye, my dearest. Keep well, both of you! In my heart there is a constant prayer: God safeguard my dear friends!

Holding you closely to my heart, your own daughter
Kartini

To Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri

Rembang, 7 September 1904

My dearest Moedertje, how can I ever thank you for the sweet dress you have sent me for our little child. It has even greater value for us because we know in what circumstances you have had to work on this gift for your grandchild.

We learnt from Roekmini that you have been unwell since your return to Batavia. To think that you, yourself unwell, having so many worries and apart from that, as always being so busy, were still able to find time to undertake such a painstaking task for our child! How great your friendship must be, how deep and meaningful must be your love for me!

From us both our sincere gratitude, dearest Moedertje. With moist eyes and a grateful, happy heart I looked at the little dress yesterday and every now and again I have to look at it again!

It expresses so much, Moedertje dearest. You have made your daughter so happy with it. Later when it can no longer wear the dress I will place the ornament around your grandchild's neck. And after that I will keep it for him until he can understand me when I tell him of the dear angel who God sent to his mother so that the ornament may become just as dear to him as it is to his mother.

My husband said to me yesterday when we received the present: 'Write to Moedertje straight away wife, otherwise it might be too late.' And I followed his advice and also the voice of my heart!

Our child has not yet arrived but it may do so at any moment. I feel that his arrival is very close at hand. My deepest thanks for your words of encouragement, dearest! The thought that, far away from me, there is a soul that is part of my own soul, that hopes and prays for me makes me strong, is so incredibly good for me. People who have seen me recently consider that I am very alert. How could I not be when such a great happiness awaits me?

What do all those hours of pain amount to when such a great, sweet happiness is the reward? I am already so looking forward to my treasure. It is so reassuring to know that so many people have been thinking of me these last days. Do I not know how those at home are thinking of me, hour upon hour,

are hoping and praying? Heaven cannot be deaf where so many hearts have the same prayer.

Moeske, I am so utterly convinced that your daughter will succeed in this. Of course you will be informed immediately when the great event has taken place. Oh my dear angel! If only you could stand by the cradle of our child! How utterly happy I would be! I know that you will love our little child even if it should be a bigger monster than his mother. As long as it is not a monster in its heart and soul then all is well, eh Moeske? And that could hardly be unless evil spirits are standing guard by his cradle. But your talisman will take care of that, will ward off evil spirits from your grandchild.

My Moeder[19] has been here with me for two weeks already, together with an old grandmother to support me in the difficult moments that lie ahead. I am being cared for, spoiled and guarded here like a princess. The nappy basket, the bed, everything stands ready in our room for the arrival of our treasure.

And Moeske, how are things with the grandmama-to-be? How is Mijnheer? Oh, I do so hope that you will receive this letter in a state of good health!

How is Didi? Is he still in China? I read with interest his article in the *Elsevier* monthly.[20] How well that boy writes, brother Edie, will he still remember me? It always pains me that I have never been able to meet him in person. And now the chance that this may happen has totally disappeared. If you should write to him please give him the kindest regards from his sister Kartini, tell him of my good fortune and that we both think of him with warm feelings.

How deliciously that fruit smells, real Native perfume! I put the dress in a chest with the little clothes so that these will all share that delightful smell. How sweetly my little one will smell later.

Good night, dearest Moedertje. Once again please accept our deepest thanks. Give Mijnheer our warmest greetings and receive for yourself a big kiss from your own daughter,

Kartini

I would dearly like to have a set of silver kebaya needles with wayangs such as you showed me here. Where can I order them? If I write to Oost en West will they be able to get them for me?

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19 The reference is to her birth mother, Ibu Ngasirah.

20 This article by EC Abendanon could not be located.

To Mijnheer Abendanon

Rembang, 25 September 1904

Highly Esteemed Director

Yesterday I received your much appreciated letter. I am very grateful for the thoughts it contained and for the kind words expressed regarding the deceased.

Certainly God has sorely tried me, yet I hope to be able to act in the spirit of her who was so dear to me and accept my lot.

Concerning the circumstances of her death I am, with respect, able to provide you with the following details.

On the 12th of this month she felt she was about to become a mother. Due to the absence of the civilian doctor, Dr Boerma, I engaged Dr van Ravensteijn from Pati who is well known for his abilities. He arrived the following day and that evening at about 9:30 the baby was born.

The birth was not without difficulty, however, as the baby was relatively large. Dr v Ravensteijn needed to make use of an instrument to facilitate the birth. It is not surprising that the Raden Ayu felt completely exhausted but Dr v Ravensteijn returned to Pati the same evening without concern. Apart from discomfiture of the womb the Raden Ayu was perfectly well. She was constantly attended by either myself or my mother-in-law, the Raden Ayu of Jepara who was present at the birth.

Dr v Ravensteijn returned 4 days later. He said the discomfiture was a consequence of the lesions caused by the birth and thus quite normal. He gave the Raden Ayu medicine but half an hour later the discomfiture increased and shortly afterwards, quietly and calmly, while lying in my arms, and in the presence of the doctor, she passed away. Five minutes before her death she was totally alert and until the last moment remained conscious.

I cannot express in words how deeply shocked I felt at that moment. I had been so happy with her during these ten months. In all she had thought and strived for she was the personification of love and her perspective was so broad that there is no one amongst her Native sisters who is her equal.

Her physical remains were buried at Bulu, 13 paal outside the city. The wreath you ordered and for which I cannot thank you sufficiently, arrived here in time and was laid on the coffin.

In the meantime the little boy is healthy, alert and full of energy. I gave him my childhood name, that is Raden Mas Singgih.

Recommending him to your affection, and expressing once more to you and Mevrouw my respectful and sincere gratitude for the interest and sympathy you have shown me.

My respectful greetings

Yours sincerely

Your obedient servant

Djojo Adiningrat[21]

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[21] Assistant Resident of Jepara, G Gonggrijp also referred to this event in part of a letter he wrote to Abendanon on 8 October 1904:

> What a terrible business the death of Kartini was. The three older sisters were all at home [in Jepara] when the news of her death arrived and they were very distressed. That very evening I set off with them and my wife so that we arrived in Rembang before the burial took place, which was a great comfort to them. They have now somewhat recovered from their loss although Roekmini is still very depressed. Singgit became Regent when I was controleur of Rembang and I like him very much and thought he was just right for Kartini.
>
> An hour before her death she was still making jokes and they all thought there was nothing the matter. Perhaps Kartini had the same problem as her father, a weak heart and it appears that the morphine that was used during the birth did not have the desired effect. Usually when it is taken people become nauseous but this did not happen in this case.

Image Plates

Plate 1 Street scene, Semarang, c.1900
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 404146

Plate 2 Kabupaten Jepara, 1936
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 80809

Plate 3 Raden Mas Adipati Sosroningrat, c.1895
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 503279

Plate 4 Raden Mas Adipati Sosroningrat, c.1900
'*Father suffers – for Kartono and Kartini – God! God! Must my poor Father experience nothing but suffering from his children? Father loves me, very, very much … He understands me completely, knows everything I am thinking and feeling – even though I have never spoken to him of it*.' Kartini to Rosa Abendanon, 7 October 1900.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15487

Plate 5 Raden Aju Moerjam, Kartini's stepmother, c.1895

'*Mama cannot be blamed for the fact that there was a time that she did not love me and I never held a grudge against her for this – even when I realized, although naturally not so clearly as now, that what was asked of her was superhuman – to raise her stepchildren together with her own brood while day in, day out she had to accept the presence of their mother at her side even though she was for her nothing more than a servant. Poor, poor Moeder, poor Mama!*' Kartini to Rosa Abendanon, 21 December 1900.

Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15488

Plate 6 Ibu Ngasirah, Kartini's birth mother, c.1895

'*My mother knew when she followed Father that she would one day get a mistress; Father had not tried to pretend to her that she would remain his only wife and when Mama married, she knew that Moeder was already there – and her children; those who were born and those who might still come. Rank, honour, respect, being married – here you see the alpha and omega of Native women. They did not know and they still do not know any better … they knew and they know, nothing.*' Kartini to Rosa Abendanon, 21 December 1900

Image source: KITLV Archive, Inventory H 1224, 13

Plate 7 Mr Jacques Henri Abendanon, Director of Native Education, Industry and Religion, c.1900
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 4751

Plate 8 Rosa Manuela Abendanon-Mandri, c.1912
'*Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Each heartbeat cried out, each pulse beat and each breath was a prayer of thanks. Oh, how unspeakably happy you have made us with your very kind letter in each word of which your warm, sensitive heart is beating for me. Let me take your hand in mine and silently holding it, let me tell you everything my heart felt on reading your words.*' Kartini to Rosa Abendanon, August 1900.
Image source: Private collection, courtesy Mr GA Abendanon

Plate 9 Kartini and family – younger sisters and brothers with RMAA Sosroningrat and RA Moerjam, c.1900
Image source: Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Object No. 10018778

Plate 10 Raden Mas Sosrokartono, c.1896
Image source: Private collection, courtesy Ibu Asri Mimi Ning Tyas

Plate 11 Kartini, Kardinah and Roekmini, c.1900
Inscription: '*In friendly remembrance of 8–9 August 1900*'.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15465

Plate 12 Kartini, Kardinah and Roekmini, 1901
Inscription: '*Hello dearest! Here we are bringing you our warmest greetings on 1 Aug 1901, hoping very much that you will be able to celebrate this day in health and happiness many, many more times. Your loving Kartini, Kardinah and Roekmini*'.
Source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15466

Plate 13 RMAA Sosroningrat with Soelastri (?), Roekmini, Kartini and Kardinah, c.1901
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 503281

Plate 14 Kartini, Roekmini and Kardinah, 20 January 1902
Inscription: '*To our dear, kind Angel! This is the last photo of the three of us together. Fate will soon determine that one leaf will be plucked from the cloverleaf but in your memory may it live on in the form of this portrait, the three leaves held together on one stem, three hearts and heads joined as one in everything! Jepara 20 January 1902*'.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15467

Plate 15 Kartinah and Soematri, c.1902

Inscription: *'Kardinah and Soematri, who have heard so much about you both from our sisters and who are fond of you, are here to give you our warmest greetings and to ask you for a place in your memory, Jepara 20–1–1902'.*

Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15480

Plate 16 Samples of Jepara woodcraft organized and possibly designed by Kartini, 1902–1903
Photograph prepared in Batavia for the Director of Education and Native Industry, Jacques Abendanon, to accompany Kartini's article, 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje'.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15489

Plate 17 Jepara woodcraftsmen, c.1900
Image source: Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Object No. 10017719

Plate 18 Classroom commenced by Kartini and Roekmini at the Kabupten Jepara, c.July 1903
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 503280

Plate 19 Roekmini and Kartini, c.August 1903
Inscription: '*To our dearest Moedertje with deepest love from her little daughters. Jepara 1 Aug*'.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15468

Plate 20 RMAA Djojo Adiningrat, 1903
'*[He is] not just an ordinary Regent. In 14 years [in that position] he has been promoted 3 times [and has] received one of the highest honours possible from the Government.*' RMA Sosroningrat to Anneke Glaser, 9 December 1903.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15471

Plate 21 Kartini and her husband RMAA Djojo Adiningrat, 17 December 1903

'*We are very happy that Kartini has married well. Her husband had an education in Leiden at a vocational school and has profited from experiencing Western education and civilized culture. He has an appealing personality, and is highly regarded and respected by everyone. It is also fortunate that Kartini has a husband whom she admires. Imagine had she had a husband who was a lesser person, it would have been a terrible misfortune. Now everything has ended satisfactorily – husband and wife are now happily married.*'
Sosroningrat to Anneke Glaser, 9 December 1903.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15470

Plate 22 Raden Aju Djojo Adiningrat (Kartini) with her husband and stepchildren, c.December 1903
'*This will be his second [marriage] and he is entrusting the care of his 6 orphaned children to her. You might be very surprised but it is now K's dearest dream to soon be with these little ones, they will form the beginning of the multitude that she wants to take into her care. It is also for the sake of these little souls that this man has chosen our good dear sister above all others because he wants to see them developed into fine upstanding people who will desire to bring enlightenment to our society.*' Roekmini to Anneke Glaser, 24 July 1903.
Image source: Courtesy Kartini Museum, Rembang

Plate 23 Kartini, Djojo Adiningrat, Soematri, Roekmini and Kartinah, 1903
Inscription: '*With sincere thanks to both of you for your love and friendship, Djojoadiningrat and his wife Kartini, Rembang, 21–11–1903.*'
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15472

Plate 24 Kartini's son, Singgih, Kabupaten Rembang, 1904
'*The little one who has had to lose the most beautiful soul on this earth so soon, is such a lovely boy. He is quite big, with fiery red cheeks and a lovely nose, mouth and eyes. He is already beginning to look more and more like his dear Mother.*' Roekmini to Anneke Glaser,
24 October 1904.
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15475

Plate 25 Kartini's grave, Rembang, September 1904
Image source: Collection of the KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands, Image No. 15492

Part Two:
Descriptive Accounts

LONGER NARRATIVES

Extracts from Kartini's Correspondence

Introduction

This section includes three lengthy and self-contained extracts from Kartini's correspondence. Extracting them in this way can be justified on several grounds. Firstly their length suggests they were consciously written as 'pieces' prepared outside the context of letter-writing. Secondly they provide coherent descriptions of several significant episodes in Kartini's life that together begin to resemble the beginnings of a more formal autobiography. They can be regarded as an intermediate form between the informal letter and the more artful published literary pieces. Thirdly, while some of the letters, in terms of length as well as content, almost match these, the three pieces selected interrupt a reading of the rest of the correspondence.

As pointed out elsewhere, by 1900 Kartini had already published three examples of writing in Dutch journals of varying kinds. This would have been sufficient to encourage any inspiring writer to replicate a display of her abilities! These pieces, then, were clearly intended to demonstrate her facility, not just with the Dutch language but also as someone who could write with flair. They also represented literary gifts to their recipients. In this context, the first two pieces, a description of her childhood (1900) and a reminiscence of her first meeting with Rosa (1901), are both pieces dedicated to her friend.

However, as consciously literary in contrast to her letters, they already begin to objectify the personal aspect of the histories they describe and suggest, more obviously than the letters, Kartini's ability as a writer to present a particular persona. Kartini's account of her childhood, written in the flush of enthusiasm in her interaction with Europe through her reading, writing (with Stella) and publishing, is revealing of how she has come to see herself through the lens of that interaction. It is an account that differs notably from that written a half century later by her sister (Reksonegoro 1958) who, in the midst of a totally different cultural environment, is concerned to emphasize Kartini's indigenous credentials. It even contrasts in some details with the informal but lengthy account written by Roekmini in 1913 for Hilda de Booij to use in her lectures to raise money for the Kartini school. It reflects all the criticisms of

Javanese tradition that she had previously reported to Stella, albeit balanced by the same optimistic vision of what she was becoming.

The second piece written in 1901 for the anniversary of her first meeting with Rosa, is reminiscent in style of the earlier published literary pieces, 'A Governor General's Day' and 'A Warship at Anchor'. Although the Javanese context is more prominent, the personalities portrayed are similarly spirited and above all, 'universal' in character. It is also reminiscent in the sense of describing a particular autobiographical event in the third person. It is in this sense that it clearly represents a transitional style between letter-writing and literary work. And, as such, it points back to Kartini's letter-writing as representing a training ground for the writer she was already giving evidence of becoming. Like the letter-writing, these provided a 'try-out' for what in this case may have become specific articles for publication in the future.

The third piece extracted from her correspondence was written for – and specifically requested by – Hilda. Again elements of it can be found in correspondence dealing with the same event and as presented here, one can see how the informal letter style segues easily into a more objective, ethnographical style of writing. This was another pivotal moment in Kartini's short life as it tore apart the 'Tiga Saudara' who had first plotted the emancipation of Javanese women. Kartini's slightly younger sister, Kardinah had been integral to the 'cloverleaf' and her command of Dutch and breadth of ideas was no different to Kartini's.[1] The 'loss' of Kardinah represented the first severe shock to the vision of the future that had been constructed in the previous three years.

Apart from the published articles and these 'stories in embryo', as it were, there are numerous references in the correspondence for requests from editors for more stories and articles and, specifically dear to Kartini, a request to write a series of fairy tales based on traditional Javanese stories. For one reason or another these either never eventuated, were never completed or sent or not published. That Kartini had a future as writer, however, can hardly be doubted and it had been her core ambition. The reason why there was a demand for her writing on the part of editors of European journals, on the other hand did not deceive her:

> Do you think we do not know why *De Echo* is glad to publish pieces of ours, no matter how insubstantial? It is good publicity for the journal. The *Holl. Lelie* offered to make its columns available to me and requested

[1] This is evident in letters written to Rosa at the same time as Kartini's letters to her, and more obviously after Kartini's death when the sisters reported on their fulfilment of these early plans. Roekmini more closely approaches Kartini in terms of writing and the conviction of her ideas and possibly is the most serious and reflective of the three.

> the previous editor time and time again to publish letters of mine. Why? For the publicity! Letters from a real daughter of the east, from a genuine young Javanese girl, thoughts from one of those half-wild creatures and, moreover, expressed by herself in a European language. Oh how terribly interesting! And if in desperation we give vent to our anguish in Dutch then once again it is deeply 'interesting' and – God preserve us – if we should die of broken hearts because of our murdered ideal then it would also be, oh so terribly interesting!
>
> Oh but there are people who are interesting and who do find things important! (Letter, 27 October 1902)

For her part, however, writing was to be the primary vehicle for informing and educating Europeans at a time in history, and in the period of her life, when she was prevented from acting out her ideals.

THE STORY OF KARTINI'S CHILDHOOD

August 1900[1]

It was playtime at the European school in the town of J. Under the yellow blossom of the waru tree in the schoolyard, big and small girls had grouped themselves in pleasant disarray on the soft carpet of grass. It was so warm, no one had any interest in playing.

'Go on, Letsy, tell us a story, or read us something,' cajoled a brown girl. It was not only the colour of her skin but also her attire that revealed her to be a Native. A large blond girl, who was leaning lazily against a tree trunk and was avidly reading a book, looked up and said: 'Oh no, I still have to study for my French lesson.'

'You can do that at home can't you, because it is not school work.'

'Yes, but if I do not learn my French lesson properly then I will still not be allowed to go to Holland in two years' time. And I am already so looking forward to going to the teacher training school to study to be a teacher. Then when I return later as a schoolmistress I may be posted here and instead of sitting in the class I will be sitting in front of the class. But tell me Ni, you have never told me, what do you want to be when you grow up?'

Two large eyes looked up in surprise at the young speaker.

'Come on, tell.'

The young Javanese shook her head and said laconically: 'Don't know.'

No, she really did not know, she had never thought about it, she was still so young and was completely involved in her young carefree life. The question her young white friend asked however left a deep impression on her. It would not leave her in peace, she heard it ringing unceasingly in her ears: 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' She tired herself out worrying about it. That day she received a lot of punishment work; she was so absent-minded, gave the silliest answers when she was asked something and made the most foolish mistakes in her work. And it could not be otherwise; her mind was not on her lessons, her thoughts remained with what she had heard during the recreation hour.

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[1] This account was attached to the letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri dated August 1900.

The first thing she did when she came home was to run to her father and put to him this significant question: 'What will I be when I grow up?' He said nothing, only laughed and pinched her cheek. But she would not allow herself to be put off and continued nagging for an answer. An older brother came by and became aware of her question and her straining ears caught these words:

'What must young girls become? Well, a Raden Ayu of course!'

The young girl was satisfied and ran off happily. A 'Raden Ayu' she kept repeating to herself. What is a 'Raden Ayu'? This new thought would not leave her in peace, she continually thought about these two little words, 'Raden Ayu'.

She must later be one of these. She looked around her, saw and came into contact with many Raden Ayus who, from then on, she carefully studied and gave her full attention.

And it was from what the child was able to discover about the lives of these women that there awoke in her heart a spirit of rebellion against 'being a Raden Ayu', to that centuries-old, strictly maintained rule: 'girls must marry, must belong to a man', without asking what – who – and how!

The young girl had reached the age of 12 and the time came to say farewell to her carefree childhood, to leave the school benches where she had been so happy and the European playmates in whose midst she had been glad to be.[2] She was considered to be of the age to be kept at home, and to surrender herself to the traditions of her country which commanded that young girls stay in the home, to live strictly isolated from the outside world until such a time as a man, of whom God had created one for each woman, should come to claim her and carry her away to his home.

In what a state her young mind and her young heart must have been when for the last time she made her way to the school. The dark eyes drowned in her tears, the slender breast heaved violently up and down and the small mouth quivered with stifled sobs. She knew only too well that together with the school door, much of what she held dear would be closed to her.

Taking her leave from her beloved teacher, who had spoken to her in such a kind and sympathetic manner when she left, from her young friends who shook hands with tears in their eyes, from the place where she had spent so many wonderful hours, demanded of her an impossible effort but this hardly equalled the grief she felt at ending her lessons. She so passionately loved learning and she knew that there was still an infinite amount to learn beyond that which was taught at the elementary school.

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[2] Kartini left school at 12½, thus at the end of the 1891–92 school year.

She was ambitious. She did not want to be less 'clever' than her white girlfriends who were going to Europe, than her brothers who were attending the high school. She begged her father to let her go with the boys to S[emarang] to attend the H.B.S. There she would always do her best, her parents would have no cause to complain about her. She lay on her knees before him, her folded hands resting on his knees. She raised her large child's eyes to him glowing with longing and in anxious expectation she breathlessly awaited his answer. Lovingly he stroked the black head, his fingers softly pushing the wayward hairs from her forehead and softly but firmly she heard him say: 'No!'

She jumped up – she knew what a 'no' from him meant. She ran out and crawled under a bed to hide herself from the others; she wanted to be alone with her grief that vented itself in a torrent of uncontrollable sobbing.

Once her teacher had asked her whether she did not want to go to Holland with his daughter Letsy and her girlfriend to study further. Eagerly, with sparkling eyes, she had listened.

'And, do you want to?'

'Do not ask me if I want to! Ask if I may!' was the answer that came from her trembling lips. Kind man, he had meant well. Stranger as he was to Native traditions, he had no idea how cruel he was in asking her that question. Offering a starving person food, delicious dainties which were out of her reach…

Foolish girl, it had not been the intention of your dear parents to send you to school to put disturbing ideas into your young heart. You had to learn Dutch and Dutch manners, nothing more. Stupid little thing, had you only understood this and kept to this then you would have been spared much suffering in the future. But the silly young thing had not created itself, she could not help it that God had given her an independent spirit and a heart that willingly absorbed everything that the Dutch language had taught her to admire. Poor little thing, Western ideas had made a triumphant entrance in her heart while she knew that she was fettered hand and foot to Eastern traditions. And her muscles were still too weak, too tender to break the bonds and chains with which she was oppressed. And later, when she felt strong enough to shake herself loose with a single wrench then … but let us not anticipate the story, we are not nearly there.

The school door closed behind her and she was welcomed warmly into the family home … The house was very large, the grounds extensive but the walls surrounding it were also high and thick. This enclosed square space was from then on to be her world, her universe. How large and beautiful and comfortable a cage it might be, for the little bird who is to be locked up in it, it is still a cage.

Gone! Gone her carefree childhood! Gone everything that had given her pleasure in her childhood. She still felt such a child, and indeed she was, but the adat placed her incontestably in the ranks of the adults – and she, for whom no stream was too wide to jump over, for whom no tree was too high to climb, who never walked but always skipped like a carefree foal in the meadow, now had to be calm, subdued, polite as befitted a Native young lady of a noble family.

The ideal Javanese girl is quiet, immobile as a wooden doll, speaking only when absolutely necessary in a whisper, inaudible even to ants – walking slowly, step by step, like a snail – laughing, soundlessly without parting her lips – it is not nice when one's teeth can be seen, one then looks like a luwuk (fox). Ni sinned all the time.

A dull, monotonous, routine life was beginning for her, day after the day the same activities, the same surroundings, the same people around her. One highlight in the early days was the arrival of Letsy. It was a festive occasion when Letsy was with her. Then she was once again the happy child of old and totally forgot her imprisonment, which avenged itself for this disregard by making her suffer doubly when the white friend had once again left. Even so, this beacon of light quickly disappeared from her colourless life. Letsy departed for the far, high North. Ni no longer had a friend. But the friendship would not be broken by distance, it would be continued through letters…[3]

The routine life went on, even duller and more monotonous … With what envious longing she watched her younger sisters when they, armed with slates and books, left the house to go to the temple of wisdom to gain knowledge. For a time she continued her studies by herself but recognizing the uselessness of learning without a teacher, with a deep sigh she put her study books away.

Oh, if only bantals (cushions) and gulings (bolsters) could speak what would they not be able to tell: they could recount the stories of the sufferings of a young soul which, with burning tears, had been sobbed in their bosom night after night! The young child just could not learn to resign herself and in that silly head and heart hundreds of disturbing thoughts continued to rampage. She felt herself so lonely and deserted in the midst of the many people with whom she lived day by day. Oh, one can have brothers and sisters, live together day by day, but if our souls cannot communicate then we remain forever strangers to each other.

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[3] No correspondence with Letsy appears to have survived.

She did have an older sister who shared her imprisonment with her;[4] she was fond of her but any intimate relationship between them was out of the question. The differences in the characters and life views of the two were too great for that. The older sister was quiet, solitary, calm and composed and she, the younger one, in contrast, was by nature full of life and energy. The opinions to which the latter was attracted were faults in the eyes of the first who was strongly attached to the old traditions and customs.

How often had the younger one not come to her older sister with sparkling eyes to enthusiastically tell her or suggest something to her. And when she had finished speaking, and invariably her older sister would wait till then, she would hear, cold and hard: 'Do what you like, I am a Javanese!' Ni's heart shrank, as though a rough hand had touched it. An icy coldness gripped her soul. Even the younger sisters were estranged from her. The oldest did not like them to have much to do with Ni, Ni who had such strange ideas. And her sister was very firm; the little ones were terrified of her.[5]

Ni found this hard, but not as hard as that which her mother did to her. She too closed her heart to her because her views were diametrically opposed to those of her child. Poor little Ni, her soul yearned for tenderness and she, wanting love, found only coldness when she craved some affection. Why was she so unusual, so strange, so different from others? Oh! She had tried so often to be different, to think like other people and each time when she almost succeeded, something happened to awaken the slumbering thoughts which knowledge of the Dutch language had sown in her heart, and mourning the fact that she had been unfaithful to them, she attached herself even more firmly to the re-awakened ideas.

But her life was not so totally dull and colourless, there were two who were fond of her as she was, who loved her as she wished: warmly and intimately. And to these two she clung with all the tender devotion of her love-starved heart. These were her father and her third brother, the youngest of her older brothers.[6] True, it was not possible for him to fulfil her dearest and sweetest wish: to be free! He could not satisfy her passionate desire for knowledge but her dear beloved father was so wonderfully good to his little daughter, his foolish little girl. He loved her so much, this she knew, she felt it. He could look at her so lovingly and deeply, his soft hand could caress her cheeks so tenderly, his strong arms could encircle her shoulders so wonderfully.

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4 This was RA Soelastri (1877–?) daughter and first child of the Raden Ayu.

5 The 'little ones' were Kartinah (b. 1883) and Soematri (b. 1888). The 'younger sisters' were Roekmini (b. 1880) and Kardinah (b. 1881).

6 This was Sosrokartono (1877–1951), Kartini's next older brother by her birth mother.

And her brother was fond of her, she knew, even though he had never told her and had never spoken an endearment to her and had never hugged her! But countless sweet attentions such as only one who loved could think of made his feelings for her clear. He did not laugh at her when she spoke to him about her ideals; he listened to her with interest and he would never make her turn cold with an icy 'Do what you like, I am a Javanese!' And even though he did not say to her that he sympathized with her ideas she, nevertheless, knew that in his heart he was in agreement with her. She knew he was only silent because he did not want to make her even more rebellious. That was clear from the books he provided for her. Ni felt she was so rich with the love of her two dear ones, and with the spiritual support of her brother.

But her father was not always with her – he had his work and where he worked she was not allowed to come since she was not allowed to leave her confines. And her brother only came home a few times per year, he was still attending school at S[emarang].

Her older brother did come home, he had completed school, had obtained a position in the neighbourhood and now lived with his parents again.[7] Ni's life was not improved by this, indeed it became more miserable. If before she had suffered from the cool reception of nearly all the members of her household, from the spiritually deadening routine, from being locked up, from all sorts of customs, which she could not accept, now teasing and tormenting increased her suffering. Ni did not want to, Ni could not dance to her brother's tune. 'The young owe obedience to their elders,' it was constantly preached at her, 'and especially young girls must obey their older brothers.' But willful Ni could not see why this must be so. She could not help that she was born later than her brother she reasoned, but that this should be the reason that she should obey him she considered downright ridiculous. She owed obedience to no one, to no one??, only to her conscience, her heart. And she would concede nothing to her brother unless she was convinced that he was right.

Being a spoiled son, mother's favourite, the one most pampered by everyone and most admired because of the high status of her father, he knew no better than that was how it should be, that everyone who he considered inferior should unquestioningly obey him. And at first he was surprised, later furious, when he saw that the young girl with an age difference of half a dozen years dared to defy his will. He would, he must cut this impudent creature down to size. Everything Ni did was wrong, for the slightest thing she was severely

7 Kartini's two eldest brothers were Slamet Sosroningrat (1873–?) and Sosro Boesono (1874–?). The latter is the one referred to here. Both were children of Kartini's birth mother.

reprimanded. Not a day went by when brother and sister did not confront each other, he with a dark countenance, addressing her with harsh words which left bloody weals on her heart, and she with trembling lips and small voice defending her rights, or those of others on which he was wanting to trample. And she stood completely alone in the struggle against the despotism of her brother, her future guardian, if it should happen that she should lose her parents before she was safely taken care of – placed under the protection of the man God had created for her!!! He took good care not to torment her in her father's presence, who would never have allowed it – and he knew she was too proud to tell tales.

But the remaining members of the household who witnessed it, allowed it to happen without a word, even though they knew that she was in the right. One should not encourage impudence and the young girl was incredibly forward – at her age she dared say 'no' when her much older brother said 'yes'. A girl can have no rights if the rights of a man could be prejudiced in any way. The only rights that belonged to a girl were those that her magnanimous brother was prepared to allow her.

And in later years when Ni recalled all this she could understand very well why that man was so egotistical. Was it not the case that all his life, from when he was a child he had been taught to be self-interested, and in the first place by his mother? From childhood he had been taught to regard the girl, the woman, as a creature of a lower order than himself. Had she not heard her mother, her aunts, her female acquaintances so often say in a scornful and derogatory tone: 'a girl, she's only a young girl!' It is therefore the woman herself who teaches a man to disdain women.

Ni's blood boiled when she heard women speak about young girls in such a scornful and contemptuous manner. 'Women are nothing. Women exist for men, are created for their pleasure, they can do with them what they will,' it rang mockingly in her ears, goading her like the laugh of Satan. Her eyes shot sparks, angrily she clenched her fists and in powerless rage pressed her lips together. 'No! No!' it screamed and shouted in her loudly beating heart. 'We most certainly are something, we are people just the same as men. Oh! Let me prove it! Loosen my chains! Give me the opportunity, I shall prove that I am a person, a human being as good as any man.' And she twisted and squirmed, she pulled and wrenched, but the chains were strong and closed tightly around the slender wrists and ankles. She hurt herself on them, but they would not break.

Her brother, hearing of her determined longing for freedom, for independence and emancipation, laughed mockingly: 'Of course you can stand on your own two feet, when you walk in front of a gamelan.' This cruel expression

cut her to the quick. She did not think about the insult which was thrown at her, she saw only the raw truth which stood starkly before her eyes: 'There were only two paths open to a young Native girl to survive this life – either marriage or … shame!' Her heart was overwhelmed by the agony of her soul. It groaned and moaned: 'Either Raden Ayu or dancing girl! Oh God! Oh God!' On the one hand delivered over to the whim of a man, on the other, to shame. Could she learn resignation? Her young head was in a turmoil of hundreds of thoughts – in her heart a spirit of opposition against the existing conditions was developing. She would not, she did not want to, submit to it. She wanted – she must – find a new way. How, she did not yet know, it was still so dark and confused in her brain – but that she wanted to, that she knew.

Precocious child! At the age when only the sunny thoughts of carefree romp and play should have filled her head, she was preoccupied with nasty, sombre and dark thoughts of the tragic things of life. It could not be otherwise – she was neither deaf nor blind and lived, as it were, in the midst of the disorganized world of Native Society that took no account of youth and refined feelings. The young tender eyes had been very roughly opened to the realities of life in all its coarseness, ugliness and shocking cruelty. From her own parents she never heard a cross word which may have pained her pure spirit and refined heart but she lived not only with her parents, she lived in the human world, in Native society, and that took no account of youth and refinement.

Oh death! Why are you regarded with such fear, you, who rescue us from the cruelty of life? Ni would be so grateful to you and happily follow you! She had no one who could show her the refined, the noble, which existed alongside the low and the mean in life. Native tradition entails that a certain distance is maintained between parents and children. Certainly they may be intimate with each other but never to the extent that exists between many European parents and their children. Ni loved her father with all her heart, yet, although she would never do anything without her parents' knowledge, she could not reveal to him her innermost thoughts. Javanese etiquette always stood, cool and dispassionate, between them.

As much as possible Ni avoided those people who with their cynicism dragged her down. And where the customs and traditions denied a refuge for her grief-stricken soul in the arms of her parents, in their hearts, she found her comfort with her quiet, silent friends, in 'books'! She had always loved reading but now her love of literature had become a passion. As soon as the work assigned to her had been completed, she snatched up a book, or newspaper. She read everything she laid her eyes on – she devoured hungrily, good and bad. It happened sometimes that she threw away a book full of abhorrence.

After all, she had no need to look in a book if she wanted to know about disgusting, filthy things; real life was full of it and it was to avoid just that that she withdrew into an imaginary world fashioned by human genius according to nature or fantasy. There were so many fine books from which she gained such indescribable pleasure, allowing her to forget all the unpleasantnesses of life. Fine characters, noble philosophies of life, great souls and spirits made her heart glow with enthusiasm and thrill with pleasure.

She was thoroughly involved in everything about which she read. And she did not lack in books: she had only to reach out her hand into the leestromel which had a fresh supply each week,[8] and her father, who was ever eager to be able to please her, and who himself took pleasure in her love of reading, spoiled her with gifts of books. She understood far from everything she read but she did not let this deter her. What was incomprehensible on a first reading was on a second reading far less puzzling and with the third or fourth reading fairly comprehensible. Each unknown word which she read she noted down in order to later ask its meaning of her dear brother when he returned home.[9] And he was always so happy to help his little sister. And oh! how wonderfully happy she was when she realized later that the literature not only provided her with pleasure but also taught her an infinite amount.

Oh, had she not had her dear father, her loyal brother and her books – would she have survived those wretched years? She would very likely have collapsed under all that terrible burden which had so severely oppressed her young life, her young soul. Father and brother satisfied the heart that so desperately sought love – and the books gave sustenance to her starving soul that the Dutch language had awakened.

A little brother was born.[10] And this helpless mite restrained Ni from a great evil – brought her back onto the right path from which she had strayed. She was fast becoming a bad child for her mother. She had closed her heart to her more and more. A baby brother burst open the portals of her heart for her mother again. The little boy taught her what a mother is, and what a child owes its mother.

Mother had dark circles under her eyes, looked weak and worn out, and Little Brother was the cause of it, baby brother who hardly left her alone, that woke crying, night after night. And yet, however much of a nuisance he might

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8 The 'leestrommel' (lit. book box) provided subscribers with a weekly selection of Dutch books and magazines.

9 Kartono boarded in Semarang during his years at the Semarang HBS.

10 Sosrorawito was born 16 September 1892. He was Kartini's birth mother's eighth and last child. As then the oldest unmarried daughter, it was her duty to assist her mother.

be, she never saw the slightest frown on mother's face; when baby brother screamed blue murder, she was by his side in an instant and she would gently pick him up and not put him down until he had gently drifted off to sleep again. Had she herself not been as small and helpless as her little brother? And had her mother not slaved and toiled for her? …

That crust of ice around Ni's heart melted and once again beat warmly for the woman who had given her her life! In his first year her little brother was healthy and well, but after that, for the next three years the little one was ill, in a constant struggle, as it were, with death. And from this illness Ni – herself a young child – learned what it is to be a mother.

She recognized her own shortcomings – she was so selfish she always thought only of her own grievances and did not recognize that others had sorrows and that she could have contributed to them. Once she had been totally dependent on her mother, just as her little brother was now – she could not have existed without her mother – then the books etc. etc. arrived which had estranged her from her. Mother must have suffered and perhaps was still suffering. Certainly she could not help it that she thought differently from her mother, but that did not take away from the fact that this caused her grief. Baby brother taught her to reflect, see things from all sides, taught her tolerance – gratitude and charity without asking anything in return…

Four years went by,[11] peaceful and calm as far as the superficial observer could see, but to the more observant, one of internal and external struggle for Ni. She may have learnt much in those years, self-control, tolerance, not thinking first of herself, but resignation she had not learnt – she could not learn. In her mind disturbing thoughts still haunted her, fed by what she saw in her immediate and more distant surroundings that made her blood boil, and by the voices which came to her from the far-off West, in books, magazines, newspapers, and letters from Dutch friends that penetrated to the depths of her heart.[12]

Only on rare occasions in those four years had she been outside her parental home. Towards the beginning of the fasting month when her parents visited the graves she and her sisters could accompany them, and once her parents had taken her oldest sister and her to an uncle who lived elsewhere.[13] For a year she and her sisters received an hour-long lesson each afternoon in handicraft from

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11 This suggests the time period, 1892–1896.

12 There are no extant letters from this period. This may be a reference to correspondence with 'Letsy' and other former schoolmates.

13 The reference is probably to a visit to the regent of Demak. The following reference to 'the Dutch lady' is presumably to Marie Ovink-Soer, and is surprisingly brief.

a Dutch lady. For Ni these were hours of pure pleasure, because then she could speak Dutch, the language which she loved so much.

In the meantime her oldest brother was transferred and Ni was ashamed at herself for being so pleased about it. He was still her brother, even if he had not been kind to her. Time and distance nevertheless did wonders, they removed all thoughts of revenge from Ni's heart and once more she loved her brother – she had sympathy for the big boy who had allowed himself to be misled, blinded by cowardly flattery and the obsequiousness of cringing, self-interested people. How it pleased her when she noticed that gradually he himself came to recognize he was in the wrong. While he did not acknowledge it to her in so many words, his deeds spoke of his regret for his earlier unjustified behaviour towards her. And Ni thanked God with tears in her eyes that her brother now loved her. Where earlier she had been the tormented, hated sister, now for him it was 'Ni this' and 'Ni that', and what others, even his wife, could not get him to do, she could.

For half a year already a younger sister had come to share her imprisonment. Bemi had been lucky – because at the age when Ni had long been safely locked up behind a high thick wall, she still gamboled free, could travel and do the other things that Ni was forbidden. Bemi was 14 years of age when she was finally kept at home.[14]

Ni was now 16; the oldest sister had married and with this marriage changes began in her life. Ni came to know her younger sisters who, up till now, had lived like strangers alongside her. The oldest sister no longer stood between them – she was now the oldest sister and she did not want to be the oldest in the way her sister was, as her older brother … she wanted to be loved and not feared. Freedom, equality, she had demanded for herself – should she not begin by granting it to others? Relations between herself and her sisters should be free and unforced, therefore away with everything which could impede this.

Ni now shared her room with Bemi and with Wi, another sister who in the meantime had also been confined to home[15] … And here the three lives, which to this point had been estranged from each other, now came together, flowed into each other to become one whole!

Here, actually, the story of the three sisters begins.[16]

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14 Roekmini turned 14 in 1894 and it seems likely she was allowed to finish her elementary schooling. Kartini turned 16 in April 1895.

15 Wi refers to Kardinah who turned 14 in 1895 and seems also to have completed elementary school.

16 Kartini did not resume this account. Kardinah (Reksonegoro 1958) indicates it was quite a selective version of her past.

THE FIRST MEETING WITH ROSA ABENDANON-MANDRI[1]

Several brief hours in a young girl's life: Sentimental memories of an old maid.

How could I ever forget you, 8-8-1900, the day above all days, when a new sun came into my life, in whose light and warmth my hungering soul found sustenance, from which it gained new, fresh vitality, and which it can no longer live without, as it became a necessity of life from the moment that those momentous first rays were felt and it appeared on the horizon of my life, radiant and glowing: my beautiful golden sun.

Can I still remember everything that occurred on that wondrous day, selected by the Gods in order that two of their elect, privileged favourites, superior spirits, could breathe new life into the languishing souls of three young girls who had been mortally wounded by the harshness of Life? – Oh yes! As if it had happened yesterday!

I see us again seated on our rear veranda – surrounded by cooking utensils – our hands busily at work and our mouths were not idle for a moment either. There was much talk of the imminent arrival of important guests – the sisters exchanged ideas about what they imagined the guests to be like.

'I know at least one thing for certain about "him"'.

'Well, tell us.'

'"He" is not particularly young any more!'

'Oh, that's nothing. I could have told you that – to have become so important you could not be young any more. So, an old one then, and what do you imagine "her" to be like?'

'Also not a young jack rabbit – let me see: tall, thin, stiff, eye-glass on her nose – a rustling silk gown … Goodness, someone from Batavia, from the foremost circles, coming here to this "despised, Godforsaken place" as many like to refer to our poor, dear little district. How she will hate everything and look down on everything, no doubt about it!'

'And how terribly formal everything will be!'

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[1] This account formed part of Kartini's letter to Rosa, 8–9 August 1901, marking the first anniversary of their meeting.

'Good heavens, perhaps she will come to dinner in a décolleté gown!'

'Don't be stupid!'

'Why? Perhaps a real peacock …'

'Oh you! All this gossip! It is not nice to imagine such silly things about people you know nothing about and who, furthermore, will be our guests. Shame on you! Who knows, she may be sweetness personified.'

'I hope so! but "she" can just as easily be a proud madam who would not deign to look at you, the type who looks down at you with cool disdain as though you belonged to some lower order of beast because she is white and European and perchance a Kangjeng Nyonya and you only a Javanese! This would certainly not be the first time, we have experienced this before!'

'Since you are in such an ill-tempered mood I will not waste too many words on it with you, I only want to say that whatever "she" might be like, I am already fond of "him"'.

'How is that? Why? What do you know about him?'

'That you will …'

At that moment the gamelan sounded and as quick as a flash we got up from the floor where we had been sitting, left everything where it was and hurried to see the arrival of our guests who the welcoming tones of the gamelan had announced.

We took up our positions behind one of the doors of the dining hall from where we had a good view of the pendopo and the alun-alun without being seen from there.

The coach drove in through the kabupaten gates, we were able to distinguish its passengers and a warm feeling of happy surprise, joy and empathy flowed through me. There, on the rear seat, next to the lady sat my father, the host, the inferior of her husband, while he sat opposite, facing backwards. This was an unheard of spectacle. Such endearing unpretentiousness, such fine tact!

'I like him!' a happy voice cried delightedly.

'Told you so!' another responded, teasingly.

'How wonderfully unpretentious! Simply wonderful! Notions of self-importance, concern about status are totally foreign to him! I like him!'

'He' jumped from the carriage, strode quickly up the steps to Ma who was awaiting him at the top and behind him an elegant lady stepped from the coach as lightly as a bird and climbed the steps with an elastic gait.

'Yu, Yu, still young and so elegant!'

'And such a beautiful face …!'

'Did you see how gracefully "she" got out, walked – and so quickly, so lightly, just like a girl!'

'Ha ha! Where is your thin, weedy old man?'

'And where is your skinny old gentleman with a shiny bald head and pure white beard?'

'Well at least some of that is true. "He" is tall and "he" does have a beard even though it is not white.'

'Oh come on, let's away. At any moment they may turn around and you will be caught red-handed and serves you right!'

And we fled away to our room where, shortly afterwards we received a message that we should come and show our faces.

'Come on then Yu, hurry up!' one of the sisters called out impatiently with her hand on the doorknob.

'Just a minute till I wash my hands!'

'Come on then, quickly, I am so looking forward to making "her" acquaintance, to see her from close up.'

Hand in hand we trotted outside like spirited foals in a meadow till we came to the door where we separated. 'Oh please let's not walk one behind the other, we will look like ducks!' 'And not too far apart please. I am rather shy!'

Hardly had we taken several steps outside when the Director who was sitting facing in our direction, noticed us and came to meet us.

Oh! What a friendly face! What kind, soft eyes! Such a pleasant voice! And oh! What a wonderfully hearty handshake!

'She' stood up, turned round and …

How am I to explain that amazing emotion which took possession of me on gazing at that dear face for the first time in my life? In the meeting of our eyes which saw each other for the first time? On hearing her voice for the first time, on the contact of her hands which had never before been touched? Was it perhaps premonition that spoke, that expressed itself in that beneficent, deeply moving moment, a premonition that 'She' would play an important part in my life, that that meeting would be a turning point in my life? It was as though a warm current flowed through me when our eyes met, our hands touched, united for a moment in a handshake, a warmth that pervaded me, excited me, filled me with joy – as if the sound of her voice vibrated hidden, unknown strings in my heart and enticed sweet sounds from them, forming melodies which enchanted me and carried me along with them.

And so, there we were, me sitting next to 'her'. I watched, listened and spoke as if in a trance!

Oh heart of mine, why do you beat so? What is the matter? What ails you?

'She' stood up, I followed her. I was to show 'her' some woodcarving! I can still see us both, standing before some fine example of Javanese craftsmanship about which she was expressing her enthusiastic admiration when suddenly I felt a gentle warmth on my shoulder. A small white hand rested there familiarly, a dear, light, soft hand that I hardly felt except for the gentle warmth that flowed from it and warmed my whole being. Sweetly 'she' asked: 'Would you like to come with me to Batavia?'

Pleasantly surprised, I looked at her and answered joyfully: 'Oh Mevrouw, very much!'

'You mean it, really, would you want to?'

'Very much, of course – but the question is if I may.'

'Might your Papa and your Mama then perhaps not allow you?'

'No, I don't think they will,' I said softly, sadly.

'I will go and ask.'

We hardly saw or spoke to each other that afternoon but when we parted I knew that I would never again be able to forget those two fine souls whom I had met. Never had someone made such an impression on me or had so quickly and so powerfully inspired my affection. Love and empathy did not knock timidly, but rushed in and in great jubilation took control of my heart before I myself was aware of it. And together with the love and feeling for our guest my heart filled with happiness!

I lay on my bed, my burning face buried in the cool pillows, both hands pressed tightly against my heart as if to calm its unnatural beating.

'Yu, aren't you coming to eat?' The voice asking this seemed to come from far away even though my sister, whose voice it was, stood right beside me.

'Are you asleep? Aren't you coming to eat?' she asked again.

'Eat?' I repeated her last word quizzically and stared at her with a look of incomprehension.

'Yes, you were feeling so hungry a little while ago, weren't you?'

'Oh yes – yes. That's right, now I remember we have not yet eaten.' We had delayed our meal, waiting for our guests to arrive and they, it appeared, had eaten extensively elsewhere.

'Go back to your playing, dear girl. Yu is no longer hungry.'

'Me neither!' 'Me neither!' With this cry two sisters flung themselves on to the bed, rolled like playful puppies along its entire length throwing bantals, gulings, everything that was in the way, on to the ground.

'Yu, Yu, don't you think she is a dear, a sweet, a treasure?'

'She is an angel!' affirmed another fervently.

'Don't you think so too? And, oh, do you know why her husband has come here? Yu, Yu, it is wonderful – heavenly.' My poor arms were almost dragged from their sockets. 'To speak to Papa about boarding schools which "he" wants to establish for Native girls! Don't you think that's just heavenly, divine! Oh those lucky ones, those who will come after us, who are now children! Oh, were we but still children. Why are we so old already?'

'Yes, lucky children!'

'Oh Yu, I am so happy, so excited, so overjoyed with everything. Just feel my hands, they are icy cold! What wonderful people they are!'

'Not formal, no kangjeng tuan or kangjeng nyonya, none of that! So completely unpretentious and open. It is as though we have already known each other for years.'

'Yes, isn't it? The Director and Directress have disappeared, don't exist any more and for us there is only Mijnheer and Mevrouw A. and they are the dearest, kindest, nicest people in the world!'

'Did you see the special gleam that lit up his eyes? That is not something out of this world, that is something lofty, something elevated! It is a light from a higher world, the light of a heavenly fire, the poet might say. I, as a mere prosaic being, can only say 'he' is surely not just an ordinary person.'

'And "she" is someone one can simply adore.'

'But listen, have you noticed that "she" speaks with a distinct but charming accent? "She" is most certainly not a Dutch person, clearly not. Do you want to bet?'

'Oh, so you noticed this too? I heard it when "she" said "Batavia" and later "Papa" and "mama"'.

'I noticed it immediately! She is certainly not German! No – perhaps "she" is English.'

'I don't think so, I think "she" is …'

'Ni! Ni!' We all of a sudden heard someone call out and the next moment Mama was standing by our bed; we immediately sat up and politely slid onto the ground.

'Dear people, aren't they, Ma?' the three of us exclaimed as though with one voice.

'Yes, very nice, both of them.'

'Aren't they!' we agreed joyfully.

'Ni – Tini,' Mama continued, with a critical glance at the state of our beds and the gulings and bantuls strewn around the floor, 'Won't you ever learn to be calm? Must you always get so excited when you are happy? I can see that

you girls won't get your cooking completed. So, they were still going to make a few things and now we see the Raden Ajengs lying in bed making a spectacle of themselves and everything is in disarray.'

'Oh Mama, I am so happy! And all those chores will be finished in a jiffy!'

'Well, I would still get started on them as soon as possible! Make sure that at 5 o'clock you are ready to go out.'

'Going out Ma? Where to?'

'To the beach of course, with our guests.'

To the beach with her, to that beautiful, delightful spot by the sea, our favourite, with her, with whom we are so totally preoccupied! As long as she will also like it!

'So, what do you think of our guests?' we were asked.

'"She" is not human!'

'How do you mean? What then?'

'"She" is a widodari (angel) directly descended from the "awing-awang" (the heavens)!'

And when I saw Father his first words were: 'Aren't they both nice?' Wonderful! Our father was also under the influence of that love which streamed from them both.

'The intimate sincere way in which "she" relates to you makes one think of Mev. Ovink. She is not Dutch, she is Spanish!'

Spanish, there you are then! A donna, I will quickly go and tell my sisters, they will find that terribly interesting. They were right, 'she' is a stranger and in fact one from the warm South, enchanting, picturesque, romantic Spain! The rapturous feelings that our wonderful new friendship had induced, increased.

We set out at dusk, the men had left before us, to our wonderful beach. Oh what a marvellous trip in the twilight with her so very, very close beside me, she, for whom my heart beat so fast.

It was in sheer delight that I listened to the magic of her golden words which revealed a great intellect, an incredible wealth of ideas and a richness of spirit; which were evidence of a warm heart, a depth of feeling and a love for Truth and Beauty and which spoke of a poetic soul.

And continuously we made the most wonderful discoveries, at one time that she was a fervent admirer of nature, at another that she was a great friend of the sea, that rowing, sailing were great treats for her, that she very much loved the outdoor life, that she thought our locality was lovely, that the roads, our pride and joy, were very fine. She painted, she wrote, she played music, all the arts we so much admired and loved! Oh! How very clever 'she' was, 'she' is able to speak 8 languages.

An extraordinarily superior, richly talented woman!

But the most wonderful thing of all was yet to come. There, at Klein Scheveningen,[2] that delightful little spot, about which she was so ecstatic, we made the wonderful discovery that 'she' was also a great supporter of the emancipation of women, a cause that we have adopted with all our heart and soul. And, knowing this, the bond that we already felt was bringing together our two lives that only several hours before were totally separate and unknown to each other, was drawn more tightly.

Klein Scheveningen, how beautiful you are! How beautiful you were that evening! – we had never seen you like this before, or since! Did you know, did you already have a premonition that people would come who would appreciate your beauty? Was that why you showed yourself in all your glory?

I see again that wonderfully beautiful beach, fantastically lit by the silvery gleam of the pale gold moon, which was mirrored a millionfold in the endless, restless stretch of water: an unending shimmer of living silver and gold!

I again hear the rustle of the coconut palms that like gigantic feathers waved graciously in the balmy evening breeze, that softly caressed our cheeks and sighed in our ears.

Sweetly the rustle of the leaves mingled with the gentle slap of the waves that, with an overabundance of youthful energy, threw themselves against the pure white sand.

That was a vision of beauty! A vision of happiness! And in those fantastic surroundings of a beach bathed in silvery moonlight, a sea of languid gold and silver, of a glorious blue sky decorated with softly shining stars and drifting clouds of silver-lined down, of waving silvery palms, of sighing breezes and the soft slap of the waves, we sat with our newly discovered treasure in our midst, listening in quiet enjoyment with an increasing awe to that melodious voice which told of the fairy-tale beauty of lands far, far away over the sea, across that infinite shimmer of gold and silver which lay before us – about her own divinely beautiful Fatherland, her Spain, with its mild climate, its rich, fertile soil, its blue skies, its clear, moonlit nights, its laughing fields and beaches – her dear Spain of which our Indies reminded her a little. She told us of two noble, respected and richly talented women who, beside the other one, were the people most dear to her in the world – her Mother and her oldest sister, women who had formed her as she now was – our kind, beloved angel!

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[2] An area of beach close to Jepara which Kartini had named after the famous beach resort of Scheveningen, near the Dutch capital, The Hague.

We heard tell of a niece – one to whom she was very close to, who had died years before, whose death 'she' still mourned. She had been an extremely talented woman, the first woman in Spain who had gained a doctorate. She herself, our dear angel, had also dearly wanted to study further, but was not allowed to by her mother…

We were again sitting in the kabupaten.

'Sister, sister, what do I see, you with a radiant face playing the zither? You who has such a dislike to strangers hearing you play that instrument?'

'I don't know why,' my sister said later when we reminded her of it, 'it just happened. I enjoyed being able to play for them. My only regret is that the other zither was broken, it would have been nicer if we had been able to play together, then we could played more, and more interesting music.'

She thought the roses that we love very much and with which we had decorated the table, very beautiful because they had reminded her of the West, the land of her birth, Puerto Rico, where these flowers also bloomed so profusely. It was marvellous to constantly make these discoveries of similarities in taste, attitudes and ideas.

We had finished eating and were sitting on the veranda that connected the pendopo to the house. Before us in the pendopo the gamelan was playing and the dancing girl was displaying her graceful talents, while a comedian was entertaining the crowd of curious onlookers gathered at the foot of the pendopo.

We spoke of the gamelan, our beautiful music in which she took such a great interest, of the refined art of Native dancing that elicited her admiration and in the course of our discussion we came to talk of the race of people who possessed the talents she had so admired.

'My husband has told me so much about your people,' 'she' said. 'He is so very fond of the Javanese.'

'I knew that, Mevrouw. I knew it because of what Mijnheer is intending to do: to provide the Javanese with education!'

'Yes, did you already know about this? My husband came here especially to speak to your Papa about it.'

The sparkling eyes regarding me so intently seemed to ask: 'What do you think about this?'

And I said enthusiastically: 'I think it is divine, Mevrouw, and I am extremely grateful to Mijnheer for it! It will be a giant step forwards! But … but what use will it be for the girls to be so educated if sooner or later they will still have to return to the traditional society, if there is only one avenue available for them to exist on this earth: marriage! Accompany it with vocational training and

then, the education intended as a blessing would truly be a blessing instead of a torture which it now is for many girls.'

'Husband, did you hear that?' She turned to her spouse. 'This young lady is asking for vocational training for Javanese girls!'

There was such an expression of pleasant surprise in her voice, there was such spiritedness in the way she said it and such a fire sparkled in her dark eyes, that it enflamed my heart.

In pleasant surprise the Director also looked at me – looked at me closely – as if trying to read my soul and asked enthusiastically: 'Yes, really, is that true? Do you want vocational training for young Native ladies? For what would you have them trained? Doctor?'

I cast down my eyes, was silent, overwhelmed by the fierce flood of thoughts which rushed through my head.

'Oh, I know,' the Director continued kindly, 'you want to be a writer, don't you? But you do not need any training for that. You can become this without having studied for it.'

A dark look in my father's eyes directed at me warned me not to pursue this any further.

But what did I care about the coming storm or possible anger? The joy of finally being listened to, being understood, outweighed the consequences ten-fold. I had to give voice to everything that had been living and boiling up for so long inside my heart. I had to express everything that had been stored up within me for so long now that I had finally found a sympathetic ear at my side!

It was like music from heaven to me to hear 'her' oft-repeated cry: 'Husband, we are in agreement, this young lady and I.'

'Ideals!' I said bitterly, 'We Javanese girls cannot have ideals – we may only have one ideal, dream only one dream: that one day we will be married off to someone of whom our parents approve!'

'No, surely not, you surely can have ideals!' she said softly and looked at me kindly, encouragingly.

When we parted, well after twelve, 'she' patted me kindly on the shoulder and confided warmly: 'We will not leave it at this, my friend, we will continue to talk about it – we will write to each other often.'

She took my hands in hers, held them long and warmly and looked deeply into my eyes: 'Would you like that?' she asked, holding my hand.

'Yes.' I said softly, with an odd sound in my voice.

The light in our room had been turned off, we were lying in bed. I held myself totally still with my face turned towards the wall. Would the younger

sisters hear the thumping of my heart? I held my guling close to my body to smother the sound of the loud beating.

'Yu, Yu!' I vaguely heard Kleintje grumbling. 'It will be your fault if we are not allowed to accompany them on their way tomorrow. Why did you say all those things? Could you not see how displeased Ma and Pa were? There will be something brewing for you, old thing!'

I did not reply – it was as though that voice came to me from another world than that which I inhabited with my loudly beating heart. I felt as though I were suffocating and yet, at the same time, so extraordinarily wonderful! Oh dear hearts, do not speak to me – leave me alone with my happiness!

After lying awake for a long time, reliving again and again those moments of ecstasy, of such joy, repeating in my mind time and time again those beloved words which emanated from her fine soul, I sailed off to dreamland with the name of those noble, unbelievably wonderful people on my lips and in my heart, which was beating for them so warmly and tenderly.

'Ni,' Mama called to me the following morning, 'tell the sisters that you are going with Pa to accompany our guests as far as Kudus. The plan at first had been to accompany them as far as Semarang but that is not possible now since they are not going directly to Semarang but are going first to Pati.'

So, we were still allowed to farewell them! How grateful we were to our parents for this token of their love. They had allowed us our beautiful young love that had made us so deliriously happy, despite the danger that we, who already had a distinct tendency to go to extremes, could be further encouraged in this direction now that our aspirations had found such rich support in our new dear friends.

Will I ever be able to forget that journey, that heavenly journey with her to the station? More than a year has passed since, a year full of rich experiences during which I have cried with joy and wept bitterly, in which I have had moments of the most heavenly experience and also hours of desperation, of doubt, of unbearable wretchedness, hours of hellish pain and of burning suffering.

I have lived more in one year than in all the previous 21 years together – and still that day exists in my imagination as clearly and as fresh as though it occurred only minutes ago and not 365 x 24 hours ago! My heart still glows, my soul still trembles with emotion when thinking of that wonderful moment in my life! How clearly I see everything before me again: 'she' in a simple, soft blue travelling outfit, a boater hat with a large blue and white-edged butterfly clip in her dark hair, in which strands of grey hair shone lending a strange aura to that young face, 'something rather interesting' as sister had declared

enthusiastically. As though by agreement, we were also wearing blue – the colour of fidelity.

'Fidelity': An insignificant word but of such gigantic importance. It is greater than love – fidelity often calls on far greater strengths. Oh, young hearts, beating so, behind that shield of blueness, may you be strong enough, powerful enough to hold her – 'Fidelity' – whose colours you are wearing, up high throughout life.

There travelled the coach, filled with the symbols of God's most wonderful gift, fidelity, along a sunlit road past laughing trees and fields bathed in golden light. Nature herself was full of laughter and light, completely in harmony with our souls trembling in an atmosphere of joy and sunshine!

Oh, did this heavenly meeting really have to end again so soon? Could this divine togetherness not be extended for one more day?

'You do not know how very much we would love to stay longer, my husband still has so much to discuss with your Papa and I still have so much, so much to tell you! But my husband cannot stay longer, his time is limited. If we could only conjure up more time – or if we could take you both to Batavia, that would be even better!'

'We are very, very grateful to you both for having come here.' Without a word she took my hand, and I did not let it go again, I held it in my lap. Oh dear, gentle hand, could I but feel your warm touch my whole life long, it would so greatly strengthen my ability to do that which is Good and to save me from doing that which is evil!

'Uncomplicated souls understand each other so easily,' she said simply when I could no longer prevent myself from admitting that sweet secret that for her could not have been a secret any more: how very, very happy I was to have come to know them both, to have found her, to have met in such a spirit of mutual affection.

These were treasured hours for me, these few hours experienced at her side! I was drunk with riches, drunk with happiness! Felt as light as a feather which needed but a breath of wind to be carried up into the blue sky, to the radiant light!

What is happiness, if it is not those moments of jubilation, rapture and emotion? Moments when we fear the breast cannot contain the jubilant thumping of the heart transporting us into the light, into a state of joyfulness, into an unreal world! – moments as brief as a lightning strike but of great duration and beneficence in their implications!

'Do not think I have always been happy,' she told me. 'There was a time, a very long period, when I was deeply, deeply wretched. I will tell you my life

history, then you can see how miserable I once was before I discovered the happiness I now have. Perhaps it might give you the courage to continue, to struggle on patiently, hopefully and optimistically in the firm belief that one day the courageous will be victorious.'

And I heard a moving story of a rich and eventful life of a woman. I heard of a period of deep, unbearable grief, of a long night of suffering, without any hope that the morning would ever break again! And that day, that totally unexpected, radiant day did eventuate. And she – she did not rejoice when finally good fortune shone through the heavy clouds of her suffering, she, oh noble, elevated soul, she wept for the one who had departed forever! She thought it was so cruel, so hard for that other one, who she had had to leave in order that she could embrace that good fortune for which she had given up hope!

I had listened, greatly moved. I squeezed her hand and in that gesture I expressed all the feelings I felt for her. Such love shone from those dear eyes, there was such a warmth in her voice when she said those wonderful, magical words, that it was as though heaven alighted on earth: 'I love you.' How simply she communicated her feelings but it penetrated directly into my heart and gently stilled the violent turmoil there. What else could I say, what else could I do than to fix her with a silent gaze in which she could read all my happiness, my gratitude.

To receive love only brings happiness if the one who receives also loves!

She regarded me closely and her voice was serious when 'she' asked me 'Would you give yourself to a good, noble purpose? Would you be prepared to leave Papa, Mama, your home and everything you love, to devote your life completely to a glorious and noble task?'

A strange feeling came over me, my heart trembled, it seemed as though all the body's blood had, for an instant concentrated there and then gushed out, streamed warmly upwards, burning my cheeks.

'Would you like to stand in front of a class? To form young lives? To lead young hearts?'

It was as if, all of a sudden, the gates of heaven opened and beyond, an endless glory lay before me! It roared in my ears, I was blinded, stunned, by the brightness of the paradise which suddenly shone before me! That was the long, long-hoped-for paradise – but was it not just a dream? A sweet dream from which there would be a rude awakening? No, the voice spoke again, I felt her look burning my cheeks – a gentle hand touched my arm – she asked again: 'Would you?'

'Mevrouw,' I said emotionally, my voice trembling, 'for me it would be no sacrifice, rather, the realization of a life's dream.'

She regarded me warmly with smiling eyes.

'But,' and at this point my voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, 'I may not take it on.'

'Why not?'

'I have not been prepared for it, I have not been trained for it.'

'Oh, that's not important, I want you just as you are, to lead the hearts of young children, to form them, to be as an older sister to these children for whom you would be a model.'

'But I have not had any training for this. I know nothing. I can do nothing. How could I teach others?'

'Would you then be prepared to undergo training for this – yes? You could spend some time at one of the convent schools or elsewhere. That is therefore not a problem. But your parents, what would they think, would they permit it, do you think?'

A shadow flitted across my face, a mist darkened the sun of my happiness. I shook my head and slowly, with great difficulty – oh it was so difficult to be suddenly dragged back down to earth from such heavenly delight.

I said: 'No, they will not.'

'Oh, go on, they will! Your father at least would surely permit you – because papa shares these ideas, but papa is no longer young, remember, he has experienced much and has had many disappointments; that makes him cautious.'

'No Mevrouw, believe me, I know better, I will not be allowed to.'

'My husband had feared as much. Just last night I spoke to him about you – my husband thought it a good idea, what I have just suggested to you but feared your parents would not agree.'

'You see?'

'But you, you yourself, you want to, don't you?'

'Yes, a thousand times yes, Mevrouw!' I affirmed spiritedly and firmly squeezed the hand which reached out for mine and with a look of love and gratitude gazed into those dear eyes which looked back at me with such joy, such happiness.

'Then my dear friend, all is well!' she said warmly. 'Be firm and have courage, hope and trust in the future. A way must be found for you. It cannot remain as it is. My husband will correspond with your father on this matter and I with you. You must get away from here to a bigger town where you can study and can have contact with superior minds…'

Sing on in my ear, you sweet voice, tell me in your own lovely way of that beauty which fills her soul, that goodness which 'she' has thought and felt, experienced and seen. Tell me about that noble man with that radiant spirit

whose soul is pure goodness, whose heart beats strongly for everything which is good, elevated, beautiful and noble, who out of respect and appreciation of the woman wishes he had the ability to create a masterpiece in honour of 'the Woman', the species to which his dear Mother and beloved wife belong – tell me of the great friend of the Javanese who desires to and will do everything which lies within his power to raise the people, to develop them to a better social standard, to greater moral and material well-being!

Tell me of that dear, dear family in Holland – those fine, dear boys with their strange, sweet-sounding names who so worship their dear Mother and are so loved by her! Fortunate children! Fortunate parents!

I see the sweetest tableau conjured up by that dear voice: a young woman at the piano, beside her a little fellow who is looking at her intently. All of a sudden a sweet child's voice breaks the silence, the little boy asks: 'Mama, why so sad? Why are your cheeks so pale? Why aren't they red?' The young woman jumped off the piano stool, knelt down, held the little one tightly to her with tears in her eyes, took him up in her arms and in this fashion brought him to his father.

The first station had been reached, alas. We changed trams! Do not fly so quickly over the smooth iron rails you snorting, steaming monster, do not allow this beautiful meeting, this heavenly togetherness to end so soon – leave us longer to enjoy our happiness.

'I wish this journey would never end, that Kudus was infinitely far away!' said our little sister, expressing the feelings of us all.

They both pressed us to come to stay with them in Batavia some day and they were so insistent that father finally gave in and promised to consider it seriously. 'But she will not be able to come, Mevrouw,' said father looking in my direction, 'she will stay home with Mama should we come one day!' And I, foolish one, had really believed it.

Yet another station was reached, we got out – our angel poured tea. Actually we had no desire for tea in that great heat. But there was nothing we would not wish to accept from those gentle hands. It was the first time and, who knows, perhaps the last time that those hands would offer us tea. Gratefully we accepted the steaming cups offered to us by that dear hand and accompanied by a friendly word from her lips, and a kind glance from her eyes, we drank that burning hot tea as though it were nectar from the Gods.

We got into the tram again, it had to continue its journey. 'Tabeh Wedono!' we heard a friendly voice say and saw the Director heartily shake hands with the Wedono of M. 'She' followed suit and reached out her small pale hand to him, which, after a 'sembah', he respectfully shook.

How this simple act spoke of the nobility of their souls. Had we not already lost our hearts to them, we would have done so then as a result of this scene of wonderful simplicity and affection!

Oh, we had already met so many important personages and with all of them, almost without exception, we had painfully experienced that rude, deep chasm which exists between Europeans and Javanese, bitterly felt their contempt and disdain of the Javanese. Petty officials who set themselves up before their subordinates as a 'focus for divine worship', as my brother put it. How refreshing it is, after all these little people who consider themselves demigods, to finally meet some who are of a high official rank, of high status but the epitome of simplicity and amiability because they are indeed high – not only highly placed in rank and status but above all high-minded and of noble spirit. And the purpose of the trip to Pati was: the Director wanted very much to meet old friends again, Native officials with whom he had worked when, years earlier, he had been President of the Landraad in neighbouring Juwana.

The greater my admiration, the stronger my love became for these superior beings – they became even more securely attached to my heart the better I got to know them.

Oh you screaming, rattling, monster, slow down, temper your speed! Do not allow the moment to come too soon when our paths, which yesterday you helped bring together, must inevitably part once more.

But alas! The stoker did not hear me and, undisturbed, continued his work, and even had he heard me, what would he care for the wishes, the desires of the heart of a foolish young girl? Calmly the monster sped along the smooth iron rails and steamed into the much-feared terminus at the appointed time. People were awaiting them, we withdrew. The last service was performed for my angel, to arrange her handbag, gloves and fan in the new carriage in which she would continue her journey. The bell sounded signaling their departure. They came towards us …

With great difficulty I forced back the terrible lump that came into my throat – that tell-tale burning in my eyes. I bit my lips to prevent them trembling. In this fashion I stood before my angel, silently, looking at her with my feelings veiled – she held my hand for a long time and said softly: 'You will have a hard struggle ahead of you, yet be firm and have courage and do not be downhearted – hope and believe.' Another warm, firm squeeze from her soft hands, one more loving glance from those dear, dear eyes and she was on the platform. 'Give me you hands once more!' She asked us sweetly. Quickly, quickly, the nasty bell was already ringing – how painful its harsh sound was.

With a sudden shock the wheels, the carriage began to move and slowly the train began to roll out of the station.

She waved with her handkerchief – he with his hat. The tram gathered speed.

There they went, off they flew, far, far away from us, people who, just a short while ago had been totally unknown to us and who were now part of my soul, inseparable parts of my existence.

Oh dearest love of my soul, only yesterday in great jubilation did we find you and now already we must let go of you. Where and when will I find you again?

Only in my thoughts, in my dreams? Oh, what pain it gives me. It was as though that speeding monster tore away part of my life and carried it off. Ah, it caused such pain.

Oh Life, mysterious Life, when will you reveal your secrets to us fully?

Who will raise for us the veil that obscures the spiritual, immaterial elements of our existence? Who will explain to us that indescribably wonderful part of human life that we call the spirit – or soul? Who will clarify that mystery which we call empathy? That mystery when two lives, each totally unknown to the other, can be brought together and be bound forever by one breath, by a single word, by a single look into each other's eyes?

KARDINAH'S WEDDING[1]

You are right. Sister's departure has been a great loss to us, we were together and very close for so long. Quite correctly it was said that we three had become one, one in thought and one in feelings. It has not yet sunk into us that Sister has left us for good: the idea that she has gone away and will not return is unbearable. We are still imagining that she has just gone to stay somewhere for a while and will be coming back one day.

We miss Kleintje a lot. But the best thing will be not to linger on that too long because that will probably not be the only difficult parting. Undoubtedly there are many more awaiting us in the future. It is unavoidable in life: separation is the password throughout life.

> It is sensible from time to time
> To shake off
> A tender and strong bond
> That binds and flatters the poor heart

This is what de Genestet says, but that is easier said than done, don't you think?

We continue to get lively letters from Sister she is faring well and is enjoying life. And that makes us grateful! Her happiness is our happiness. And now I will respond to your request and tell you about Sister's wedding.

A native wedding is always a busy affair. Preparations were already being made for the big day weeks in advance. We celebrated Sister's marriage quietly because of a death in the family. A cousin of ours, a sister of the bridegroom died shortly before the wedding. Poor thing, she was still quite young, and left young children behind. You should know that Sister married her own cousin: his mother is a sister of Father. He had been here once before but then he was still a student and nobody had thought then of any link. It does, however, happen that children are engaged and are married, and later, when they have both grown up or reached adulthood, to marry or renew their marriage vows.

Sister's acquaintance with her husband was renewed when the Governor-General was in Semarang. Custom is that young girls are never allowed out of the house except when the time comes to follow some husband completely unknown to her. But as I said before, we had already broken with many traditions, which was inevitable given the kind of upbringing we have had. And

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[1] This account formed part of Kartini's letter to Hilda de Booij-Boissevain, 21 March 1902.

we are intent on continuing to break some more! Closer to her wedding day a Javanese girl may on no account leave the house; she has to stay inside or, if she has her own room, stay in her room.

But in December sister and we were in Semarang and were in and out of the shops all day to buy things ourselves.

A Javanese girl is not congratulated on her engagement, and one does not discuss it with her, and she herself even less. She acts as if she knows nothing about it.

I would love to know what our compatriots thought when they heard Sister casually talking about her impending marriage. Well, we are such 'terrible' creatures. But isn't it the same with more educated people? Amongst them also one is ever ready to judge that which one doesn't understand. We must not think ill of our poor ignorant compatriots, and we don't.

A day or two before the marriage took place the ancestors were remembered. That idea is quite poetic. We always remember our dead with joy. An offering meal is prepared during which priests pray seeking the blessings of the departed for the forthcoming marriage of their descendants. This takes place at the home of the bride's family.

My future brother-in-law arrived with his family the day before the wedding. The first thing a European bridegroom would do on arriving at the town of his bride would be to go and see his bride but with us there is no question of that. On no account must the bridegroom see his bride before the match has been sealed. Even his family may not see her.

The day before the wedding the bride is bathed in a bath of flowers and after that she is taken in hand by the tukang paes (the bride/bridegroom's dresser), a woman whose special skill is dressing brides for which service she is paid. The bride takes her place on a mat specially made for the occasion on which pieces of cotton and silk, sufficient to make a kabaya, have been sown. This becomes the property of the tukang paes. During these preparations she is surrounded by all kinds of cakes, as well as sirih, pinang nuts, bananas, a gendi[2] with drinking water, uncooked rice and roasted chicken and … a live chicken and a small oil lamp.

Incense is burnt and the tukang paes shaves the fine hairs from the bride's face and neck. The hair on the forehead is cut evenly as is the hair around the ears. Also the eyebrows are shaped with a razor. One can recognize recently married Javanese women by the way the hair on the forehead and around the ears is cut and by the shorn eyebrows.

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[2] This is a long-necked earthenware flask with spout used for drinking water.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon a beginning is made on the bride's toilet. Her forehead is painted with a black paste to just over the ears which frames her face, while her hair is cut in the style of a butterfly and covered with flowers. On the coiffure seven jewels are attached to spirals which constantly jiggle up and down.

Her toilet is completed by the wearing of a gold-laced kain, a kebaya made of gaze de lis and the mandatory jewelry such as brooches, a necklace, armbands, earrings and cufflinks.

Young Javanese girls are not allowed to wear flowers in their hair, only married women may do that. One often sees elderly women with flowers in their hair.

The evening before the wedding is called 'widodrenni'. Widodari means angel, or heavenly being. On her last night the young girl who is about to be married is compared to such heavenly beings and is thus celebrated on that evening.

No doubt you have seen the photos of Japanese[3] woodcarvings in the home of Mevrouw Roosenboom and you probably can remember the picture of a piece of furniture that is meant to represent three arches. Well that piece is called 'kwade' (pronounced kwadee) and is a piece of furniture used at weddings. This beautiful piece of woodcarving, entirely gilded and based on a purple foundation was placed somewhere at the back of the kabupaten. All tables, chairs, and benches were removed and the floor covered with one large alcatief.[4]

On both sides of the kwade which was decorated with curtains and flowers stood two large copper vases filled with young palm fronds and flowers. These vases are called 'kembang mayang' and must never be omitted at a wedding. About half past seven in the evening when our female guests had assembled in the room where the kwade stood and had seated themselves on the ground in two rows on each side of the kwade, my Sister entered led by the hand by our married sister and sister-in-law followed by a woman who carried her sirih box and cuspidor. Sister took her place in front of the central arch between her family and the most important guests. The sirih box and cuspidor were placed beside her, merely as a formality because Kleintje does not eat sirih. Behind her was a little girl who fanned her.

As immobile as a Buddha statue, Sister sat cross-legged in front of the gleaming gold kwade in the midst of the soberly dressed and grave-looking wives of the Native officials seated according to the rank of their husbands on

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3 The original states 'Japanese' (D. Japans) but is likely meant to be Javanese (D. Javaans).

4 Persian carpet.

each side of the bride. Tea and cakes were presented. Each person was given a cup of tea and a few dishes of cakes while the bride and the most important guests had their own tea service and a tray full of cakes. There was, as it were, a carpet of cakes spread before the guests here and there interspersed with golden, tortoiseshell, silver or wooden sirih boxes and cuspidors. The company consisted entirely of married women – we unmarried girls were not part of it.

You have probably already heard that no greater misfortune can befall a Javanese than to remain an unmarried woman, which is regarded as a scandal. It was not long ago that in Europe, which is so enlightened, people also thought like that, isn't that so? We can therefore not blame the slumbering, unenlightened Indies, can we?

If the bridegroom's mother is still alive then she also joins the festive evening in celebration of her daughter-in-law to be. Our male guests stayed with Father in the pendopo while the bridegroom stayed at the house where he had taken lodgings.

Whether sister was happy when, at about nine o'clock the ceremony was over, only she knows. She walked out of the room in stately and sober fashion between the rows of women but she was barely out of their eyesight when she ran to our room to undo herself of all that finery. Then she was our little sister again, our dear, happy Kleintje, and no longer a Buddha statue.

That evening the Prophet was remembered. At our expense a large slametan was held in the mosque and prayers were said, calling on heaven's blessings for the forthcoming marriage. Only men take part in that meal. Our female guests ate at our house, as did the regents who had come especially for sister's wedding.

On 24 January, the kabupaten, gaily decorated with green streamers, was already a hive of great activity early in the morning. The tricolour[5] flapped cheerily above the young green palm fronds which marked the road up to the house of the bridegroom. The gamelan played lustily in the pasebans – the two little buildings erected on the alun-alun in front of the kabupaten which had been painted green.

On the rear veranda many deft women's fingers were stringing together the baskets of kanangas, cempkas and melati flowers into streamers or were removing leaves off the flowers that would later be scattered along the path which would later be taken by the bridal pair.

The kabupaten was filled with the perfume of flowers and incense, and with the bustle of many busy little people, while in our room a start was being made on preparing the bride. Again her forehead was painted black but this

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5 The Dutch flag.

time it was decorated with small golden figurines. Sis was lying down while this was being done. Behind these figurines Sis wore two pieces of lacework made of gilded black wax as in this accompanying sketch. Jeweled buttons were later inserted into the small holes. We decided to use a false headpiece for Sis because otherwise it can be quite painful and she has just recovered from an attack of dengue fever.

A golden diadem was then attached behind the lacework. The hair at the back of her head was shaped into a half moon and filled with flowers which reached to her shoulders. The seven bobbing jewels on spirals were then attached to the coiffure from which six strings of flowers were attached that reached from behind the ears, over the breast down to the waist. These strings, which were about the thickness of a finger were made of white flowers interspersed with small rolls of golden thread and ended in a yellow kananga filled with melatis.

Officially the wayang costume requires a decolletée, which leaves the neck, shoulders and arms totally uncovered. All one could see of our sister, apart from her face which was whitened, was painted with a sweet smelling yellow paste. She wore a kain decorated with gold, over which she wore a silk material also threaded with gold. Everything was kept in place by a yellow belt of silk from which trailed long strips of red silk decorated with gold figures.

Her upper body was wrapped in a long dark green cloth against which the gold illustrations stood out wonderfully, the middle was of a lighter green material and her arms and shoulders were left free. Around the yellow belt, which is called 'mendologiri', was wrapped a golden band about three-fingers in width, decorated with jewels to which was attached a string of flowers which reached around her back from one hip to the other.

Around her neck she wore a collar, as I have drawn here, which reached almost to her middle. There were armbands on her wrists and around her forearm she wore an armband in the form of a snake with its head and tail sticking out to which golden coins were suspended.

It was already well past five o'clock in the afternoon when the wives of the Native officials[6] assembled in the kwade room. From here to the pendopo a

[6] Kartini uses the common colonial term, 'Inlandsch Hoofden'. They were the group of Javanese regents and their immediate subordinates, typically representing aristocratic dynasties. Although until the twentieth century largely hereditary, their appointment to the Javanese arm of the colonial government had to be approved by the colonial administration. The Indonesian term for this group of officials is 'Pangreh Praja'. The usual English translation, 'Native chiefs', is inappropriate and here the term 'Native officials', while also not entirely satisfactory, has been used throughout as more appropriately reflecting their position.

carpet of flowers had been laid over which the bridal couple were to walk. Sister was escorted by her sisters from her room and took her place by the kwade. The lamps had already been lit. In the pendopo the regents were arrayed in their official costume. There were also a few European acquaintances who Sister wanted very much to see for the last time as an unmarried girl.

The alun-alun and the grounds of the kabupaten were full of people; only the road marked on both sides with green fronds and flags remained open.

Then, in the distance one could vaguely see something yellow approaching. As it came closer one could discern a swarm of opened, gold-striped sun umbrellas beneath which their owners, the native officials, walked in official costume. It was the procession which preceded the bridegroom. He rode with some regents in an open vehicle covered by shining golden sun umbrellas. From the pasebans and the kabupaten gamelan music welcomed the approaching procession.

When the procession reached the kabupaten it stopped in front of the pendopo. All the Native officials crouched down. The bridegroom descended from the coach and, escorted by the three regents who accompanied him, mounted the steps and advanced to the centre of the pendopo where all three knelt on a large carpet and showed their respects to Father and the other regents. The two accompanying regents, still on their knees withdrew backwards, leaving the groom in his wayang costume on his own for a moment in the middle of the pendopo. Then the other Native officials formed a square around him inside which a group of priests formed a smaller square. Seated on the floor at one end were the regents, with Father sitting closest to the groom and the head priest who would perform the marriage. Father explained to the attendant assembly the purpose of the occasion after which he requested the Panghulu (head priest) to formally join his daughter in marriage to the bridegroom. With this there arose an almost mystical murmur from the midst of the crowd.

Prayers were being said.

I was sorry that we were not able to observe this from nearby. A lady teacher, Roekmini and I were the only women in the pendopo which was otherwise entirely filled with men. It was already quite something that we were allowed to be where we were; we had simply taken the liberty to do so. But to stand closer in the midst of all those men to see what was happening from close by was not possible. It is a pity because we very much wanted to hear the marriage rituals and see how everything took place. We know only that as he recited the marriage vows the Priest held the bridegroom's hand while the groom repeated the words after him.

The formalities lasted 15 minutes at most but to us the minutes seemed like hours. It was so formal and quiet in the pendopo; the only sound that could be heard was the mystical chants of the priests.

The large crowd in the pendopo began to stir; the priests shuffled backwards on their knees. The marriage had been formalized.

The regents stood up. Two of them raised the bridegroom to his feet to commence the journey along the carpet of flowers, the groom followed by the procession of regents. At the back, in the kwade room, the sisters raised the bride to her feet and they also began to walk down the path of flowers, followed by Mama and all the female guests. When the bride and the bridegroom came to within a few paces of each other, their respective attendants released their hold and the bridal couple threw a rolled up sirih leaf filled with flowers at each other. They took a few more steps towards each other and then they both knelt down, followed by the entire gathering.

The bridegroom sat down. On her knees the bride shuffled towards him, sat down and made a sembah – bringing both hands together just under her nose (this is our gesture of respect) and kissed his right knee. Again the bride made a sembah. Standing up unaided, the bridegroom raised his wife up and hand in hand, the bridal pair continued to walk along the flower-strewn path towards the kwade followed by the entire company except for the regents who returned to the pendopo.

The bride and bridegroom took their place in front of the two Buddha statues, members of the family and the lady guests took their place on either side. Behind the bridal couple were two little girls who kept them cool with fans.

In most cases, this meeting is the first time than the man and woman would have seen each other.

At about seven o'clock the regents entered and formed a half circle around the couple sitting on the ground; the other half of the circle was formed by the female members of the family.

The bridal couple performed a footkiss to the older members of the family.

First the bride raised herself on to her knees and shuffled forward to Mama, made a sembah, and kissed mama's knee. In this way she received the maternal blessing for her marriage. From Mama, Sister went to each of the aunties, sisters and cousins who were older than her, and repeated the same ceremony. Thereafter she went to Father, to kiss his knee and receive his blessing. From there she went to her father-in-law and then to all her uncles and cousins. When, after having given them all a foot kiss and she had returned to her place, the bridegroom began the foot kiss journey. He followed the same

procedure as his wife. When he also had completed the ceremony, the regents removed themselves and tea and cakes were served as on the previous evening. At half past seven the bridal couple was allowed to leave.

They left the hall hand in hand. Actually, they should have done this on their knees but since they had both just recovered from illness they were permitted to walk.

In other families, a bridegroom coming to the home of his parents-in-law, before meeting the women, would have to crawl up the steps rather than walk. That is the formal court style.

The bridegroom took himself to the room of the bride and our sister came to our room where we prepared her dress for the reception with Europeans. Here the work of an entire day was destroyed in 5 minutes. Only the coiffure and her forehead was left untouched. We unmarried girls were actually not allowed to dress her but we did nonetheless. We thought it too ridiculous that we sisters would not be allowed to touch her bridal clothes. Sister was now dressed in silk kain woven with gold thread and a kebaya of ivory coloured satin with silver embroidery. She wore a new jewelry necklace. The flowers in her hair and the diadem were removed and replaced by a golden crown from which hung a veil. Other jeweled flowers on spirals were placed in her hair. Clothed and crowned in this fashion it was as if she was a bride who had stepped out of picture from a story from the thousand and one nights. Sister was dressed in the clothes of a fairy princess, from the tales of 1001 nights.

It suited her so well – as indeed had the wayang costume. It is a pity we were not able to have her photographed like this.

The bridegroom reappeared in his official costume. Once again the bridal couple took their places before the kwade. Just before eight they made their way, arm in arm, to the front veranda where, against a background of palms, two gilded chairs stood ready.

Standing, they received the good wishes of the European ladies and gentlemen. Even though it was officially a reception, enthusiastic dance feet were soon swept along through the pendopo by the music. Even the bridal couple strolled arm in arm a few times around the pendopo.

It is not the custom for young girls to appear at a wedding but it would have been too silly if WE would have been absent from our sister's wedding.

A little before twelve the Resident, who had also arrived, proposed a toast to the young couple which was responded to by Father. After this the Europeans took their leave but the Resident and a few others amongst whom was one lady, our friend, remained behind to participate in the Native part of the festivities.

After the European guests had left the Native officials, who during the reception had remained in the pendopo, now made their way to the middle of the pendopo to form a half circle within which the groom had to demonstrate his dancing ability. Before this they had changed into their less formal costumes.

Then the gamelan began to play, a dancing girl appeared and danced in a square.

The Patih of Jepara, on his knees, offered the bridegroom a silver platter on which lay a silk cloth. When this was picked up, he withdrew. The gamelan continued to play softly: it was a prelude, an invitation to the star of the festivity to open the proceedings. The bridegroom stood up and took up a position in the middle of the pendopo. He tied the silk cloth, with which he would be dancing to his kris and commanded the gamelan players to play his personal song which was immediately introduced and played.

I won't attempt to describe the dance for which my pen would be unqualified. I can only say that it was a pleasure to behold the graceful movements of the energetic dancer as they followed the tones of the gamelan music. The dancing girl behind him followed his movements, and also sang along. The surrounding Native officials accompanied the music by singing and with handclaps.

Towards the end of the dance, the Resident approached the dancer with two glasses of champagne. Just as the gong indicating the end of the song sounded the dancer and the dancing girl sank to their knees. With a sembah, the dancer accepted a glass from the Resident and, while the onlookers gave three cheers, and the gamelan sounded a jubilant note, the recipient and the giver emptied their glasses. A servant then retrieved the empty glasses and the Resident withdrew. The dancer stood up again and resumed dancing. Next his Papa-in-law brought him a toast: they approached each other dancing and as the gong sounded once more, the younger man knelt to receive the glass from the older man.

Only when all the regents had also offered him a toast was he allowed to take his place again beside his wife. Soon afterwards, the bridal couple withdrew, the remaining European guests went home and the festivities were continued by the officials until early in the morning. Those gentlemen also danced, and especially our assistant resident performed very well.

Ma, our European girlfriend, sister Roekmini and I remained until the last of the European guests had left.

The bridal couple spent the following day quietly at home. The last ceremony that they would have to perform was to be undertaken in the late afternoon of that day. This is the first visit by the bridal couple to the parents of the groom.

In Javanese this is called 'ngudoh mantu', which literally translates as 'to pluck a daughter-in-law'. The daughter-in-law is compared to a flower which the parents-in-law have picked for their son.

Actually for this occasion the couple should have dressed in their bridal costumes again but it would have been much too tiring and so it was ignored. The bridegroom was dressed in normal clothes. Sister wore her silk kain with gold thread and satin kebaya again. Her hair was again shaped in a coiffure with little squares filled with flowers and held together by a net woven from melati. Once again jewels bobbed up and down from spirals held in her hair.

The bridal couple travelled in procession, they in a carriage, preceded and followed by Native officials on foot to the house where the father of the groom was lodging.

The newlyweds are still referred to as bride and bridegroom days and weeks after the wedding and the bride continues to be referred to in this way until she becomes a mother. There are women, mothers, who are referred to as 'nganten' (short for 'penganten', meaning bride as well as bridegroom) their entire lives.

The days after the wedding were spent making visits to European and Native acquaintances.

Five days after the wedding another festivity was held at the Kabupaten; this was to mark the very next pasar day on which the wedding had taken place.

A week after the wedding the newlyweds left, feted along their route in towns by members of the family who they visited. The marriage was celebrated again in Tegal where they stayed a further week before finally arriving at their own home in Pemalang.

So, there you have it, a description of a Javanese wedding amongst the higher echelons of society. Sister's wedding was regarded as a quiet wedding and this already occasioned so much activity: what would a wedding be like that was celebrated more elaborately?

We were dead tired after the wedding.

Presents which Natives give to each other at weddings consist of clothing such as kain, or material for a coat but also food items such as eggs, hens, buffalo, the latter though more intended for use for the slametans that accompany a wedding. In this way Kardinah amongst other things was given a fine buffalo by an uncle. This should have also been put alongside the other presents!!!

Oh, something else: if, on the occasion of a wedding a buffalo is slaughtered – usually more than one is slaughtered for a wedding feast – small woven bamboo containers filled with sirih, biscuits, pingang nuts, a little meat, some

clotted blood from the slaughtered animal and flowers are placed in every conceivable corner and hole at crossroads, bridges as well as around the wells on the property. These are intended as offerings to the spirits that live there. If these crossroads, bridges and wells are not remembered, then the spirits would feel insulted by the participants at the festivities and an accident would occur. At least that's what the popular belief is! What the origin of this belief might be I don't exactly know.

By way of an addendum:

In some areas, the practice is that when the bridal couple meet, the bride will, in recognition of her subordinate position, wash the feet of the bridegroom before offering him a foot kiss.

When a widower marries a young woman or a widow with a young man, then, after the throwing of the sirih, the one who had previously been married offers the other a piece of burning wood. The other person is given a can of water which is emptied out over the fire which of course is put out, after which the burnt piece of wood is thrown away and the can is destroyed. The intention or meaning of this symbolic act I will not need to explain to you, it should be clear enough.

You should have seen Sister when she was standing there as a Buddha statue in front of the kwade. She should have been photographed in this pose, or rather painted, because then one could also have seen the colours. How serenely and calmly she walked across the carpet of flowers, spreading the perfume of flowers and incense everywhere. Yes truly, she had all the air of a Bodhisattva!

I cannot hear gamelan, or smell the perfume of flowers mixed with incense without being carried back in time.

The people gathered the flowers on which sister had walked in order to save them: it is said they bring good luck and bring young girls a husband!!!!

I have here a beautiful book on Buddhism. It is called *The Soul of a People*.[7] It is very good!

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[7] Kartini's reference here to Henry Fielding's *The Soul of a People* (1898, first Eng edition) suggests it may have provided her with an 'ethnographic' model. It contained at least two chapters on the position of women in Burma in the context of Buddhist culture. It emphasized spiritual freedom and universalism and the contrast between science and 'soul', themes whch would have appealed directly to Kartini.

Maar de vrouw kan zich bedroeven
[illegible] moet dan gezond en gezwind
betalen. — Een elken dingen gelijkenis
is het voorgaan.
Daarom bevelen wij eerbaardigheden
setten voor en verklaringen. als in
het verzicht. behaagde Vrouw, wenn
de vrouw. gelijkelijk met kinderen
en idioten. ? —
Laat ik en een kind wenen over
sprechen. Later kann ik eenmaal op

Part Three:
Published Short Stories

R.A.KARTINI
1879-1979
REPUBLIK INDONESIA
100,-

INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLISHED SHORT STORIES

At the turn of the twentieth century the Dutch colony was becoming the focus of literary attention. Apart from a series of traveller's impressions such as those discussed by Kartini in her correspondence and more polemical publications such as Bas Veth's *Het Leven in Indië*, a diatribe on the devastating impact of colonial relations on the Dutch character, the Indies were proving a rich source of inspiration for metropolitan Dutch and colonial authors. Amongst the most well known from this period were Louis Couperus whose 1900 novel, *De Stille Kracht*, was an instant bestseller and Augusta de Wit whose books were first serialized in Indies newspapers. Most colonial and metropolitan papers included feuilliton which provided copious space for serialized romances which all fed into a growing fascination with the exotic East. The best of this writing found critical acclaim as meeting the new literary preoccupations with more naturalistic and expressionistic styles, and a growing artistic interest in the inner life. At a more popular level, 'the colonial novel' was becoming popular for its daring realism, its exotic locations and questionable moral plots.

The editors of the women's periodicals, such as Johanna de Woude of *De Hollandsche Lelie*, Mevrouw Ter Horst of *De Echo*, Dr Pijzel of *Eigen Haard*, Mejuffrouw van der Meij of *Belang en Recht* and AG Boes of *Neederlandia*, who each approached Kartini for contributions to their periodicals, were keen to exploit this new interest amongst their readers, if only to show how up-to-date they were in also addressing the growing indigenous interest in imperial policy and practice. As Kartini suspected, journals such as *De Hollandsche Lelie* could pander to a new interest in, or at least curiosity about, articles written by 'natives'. In particular, they would have been impressed by the ability of an *Inlander* able to write in fluent Dutch and in a style that conformed so closely to what they had grown accustomed to; they would have been favourably impressed by the turn of phrase, been pleasantly amused by the stories and felt suitably better informed about the Dutch colony. In being in direct communication with the author the editors could have congratulated themselves as contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and promoting interest in Javanese society.

Kartini's first two short stories appeared in the colonial women's periodical, *De Echo*, published in the royal city of Yogyakarta. In style they replicated the kind of light and rather flowery style of writing popular at the time in

publications intended for 'innocent girls and young women and exuding a fine moral tone' (Bel 1993:30).[1] The stories, 'Een Gouverneur Generaals Dag' (A Governor General's Day) and 'Een Oorlogsschip op de Ree' (A Warship at Anchor), published in 1899 and 1900 were probably revisions of pieces written earlier and perfectly suited the genre expected of these periodicals. Apparently simple, semi-autobiographical narratives portraying aspects of the lives of young Javanese girls, they nevertheless contain an undercurrent of critical commentary on aspects of the colonial condition. They were effectively anonymous, signed only by 'Tiga Saudara'.

Taken together with the lengthy and culturally informative letters to Stella and the two 'ethnographic' articles published at this time, these are the output of what appears to have been Kartini's most active writing period. She was then clearly in the full flush of enthusiasm about her reading of Dutch feminist and other literature, finding in writing for publication and in letters to Stella an outlet to express the ideas discussed with Marie Ovink-Soer and her two near-age sisters, Roekmini and Kardinah. It was also the period between the departure of Marie Ovink-Soer and her first meeting with Rosa Abendanon-Mandri in August 1900, a brief hiatus before her time was occupied in writing the long letters to her new friend in which she explored in more intimate detail her hopes and aspirations.

In line with the portrayal of herself as a person with modern ideas in her letters to Stella, in these semi-autobiographical stories Kartini also presents herself (and her sisters) as 'normal' in two senses. Firstly, the women and their activities are presented in a way that intentionally elides their Javaneseness. Instead, the characters are presented in ways indistinguishable from those of young European ladies in the colony and perhaps little different from the staid existence of young women in polite European homes. Secondly, they are presented as normal in a social sense, as ordinary respectable young women, and not as members of an exotic, noble Javanese dynasty. The stories intend to express a 'sameness' – or rather an equality – with Europeans. In characterizing the protagonists of her stories in this way, Kartini

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1 This is Bel's characterization of *De Hollandsche Lelie*. The more serious *Belang en Recht* hoped to publish more serious pieces relating to her educational and reform aspirations. The editor of *Nederlandsche Taal*, a local publication intended for graduates of the native civil service training school, presumably wanted writing 'models' to inspire its graduates but was also keen to see Kartini 'address particular topics' that might educate them, such as 'Native education for girls', 'something about Native arts' and a 'useful institution for Natives' (Kartini, 21 December 1901). *Eigen Haard*, established in 1875, was a general educational and cultural periodical. *Belang en Recht* was established in 1896 to address the legal and political concerns of the women's movement.

was projecting the same modern persona as she was presenting in her letters to Stella, at once establishing what she wanted to be recognized as and what she had come to see herself as being: that she was no different from Europeans.

The stories, moreover, present lively and realistic portrayals of the modernity of Semarang and Java. The jolly tone of the 'A Warship at Anchor' replicates a briefer account Kartini provided to Marie Ovink-Soer in letter to her in November 1899, soon after she had left Jepara. 'A Governor General's Day' similarly appears to describe a recent visit to Semarang to celebrate this colonial occasion which would have been mandatory for all senior civil servants including both her father and the Ovinks. Whether Marie had encouraged her to write it as a longer narrative and recommended it to *De Echo*, or whether Kartini herself took this initiative remains unknown, but there is little doubt that a direct relationship exists between a self-conscious presentation of her life in the construction of her correspondence and the writing of these literary pieces for public consumption.

Somewhat different are the two later publications. 'From a forgotten little corner', written in 1902 and published in 1903, is written to suggest an occasion (or an amalgam of occasions) when Kartini accompanied European visitors to the Jepara woodcraft centre. It is styled as a light-hearted journalistic piece. The other, 'Disillusionment', probably written in 1903 and published posthumously in 1904, was her last publication. Quite different in tone it attempts a different writing genre compared to the earlier stories.

The first is effectively a promotion of the Jepara woodcraft industry that she had been helping to develop. In a postcard of 11 October 1902 Kartini indicates it had been written at the request – or suggestion – of Jacques Abendanon who had also arranged for it to be accompanied by photographs of samples of the wooden objects. It fitted admirably the interests of the readership (as presumably Abendanon had anticipated), by then increasingly aware and possibly already in possession of examples of the craft being described, the article would have contributed to stimulating this interest.

The second, clearly an allegory of her own position, gained contemporary significance from the fact that it was published posthumously – Kartini's premature death had been widely publicized. Its literary form, an attempt to write in the style of a fairy tale, suggests the influence of Nellie van Kol. Famous for what became her Volksbibliotheek (People's Library) commenced in 1901, and her periodical dedicated to literature for children, *Ons Blaadje* (Our Little Newspaper), Nellie had asked Kartini in July 1902 to collect (and perhaps rewrite) 'fairy tales' from Java to contribute to Nellie's collection of

fairy tales from around the world. Although it is not clear whether Kartini was in fact able to undertake this plan, it was something that Kartini was excited about doing. This fairy tale, most probably written in the latter part of 1903 in the months after her betrothal, was clearly an allusion to her own experience in having had to give up her feminist ideals in accepting the proposal of marriage. It might be contended that the story was intended to also suggest that these ideals themselves had been illusory.

Finally, this collection of 'literary works' includes a poem reputedly written by Kartini and included (with little indication of provenance) in the 1976 (Dutch language) edition of *Door Duisternis*. The sentiments – as well as the sentimentality – certainly appear to reflect some of Kartini's other writing and the subject matter – the importance of friends – was a regular theme in her letters.

While the four stories can hardly be said to have literary merit, they are, firstly, of interest for the fact that they reflect the themes of the better known correspondence and amplify our appreciation of Kartini as a writer. More importantly, taken together with Kartini's other writing, they confirm the sophistication of Kartini as an emerging writer. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that effectively Kartini's writing in this period covers three distinct genres: ethnographic or formal academic writing, literary fictional writing and the more informal style of writing of the letters. Further, these various styles were specifically selected to relate to the particular readership and contexts for which the writing was intended. Nowhere, however, does Kartini's name appear nor, not having written in Indonesian (Malay) or Javanese (apparently), does she appear in the canon of early Indonesian modern literature. Kartini is thus denied the right to be recognized as an early modern Indonesian writer. (Ironically, at least one anthologist has included extracts of her letters in an anthology of Dutch colonial writing!)

Nevertheless where it is generally understood that the decades either side of 1900 saw a remarkable flowering of early Malay-language writing, much of it either translations or in imitation of Dutch and European models, a case can be made for including writing in Dutch by early Indonesian writers in this corpus. As the history of the early twentieth century generation of Western-educated Javanese reveals more generally, much of their intellectual and literary output was expressed in Dutch in media that were increasingly coming to be owned and directed by Indonesians themselves. The period of Kartini's correspondence and publications saw the emergence of a flourishing press that gradually also came to include a variety of Malay and Chinese language publications, publishing organizations and proprietors. Much of this

early twentieth century publication reflected ideas and principles similar to those expressed by Kartini and if ideologically conservative compared to the later nationalist movement, their basic commitment was to the articulation of a cultural nationalism.

Nellie van Kol's introduction to one of Kartini's published stories represented a significant moment in the 'coming out' of Kartini in contemporary Dutch society. While she had earlier written about Kartini in introducing her to members of the Oost en West association, people in Europe with a particular interest in 'things colonial', her introduction to Kartini's 'Een Vergeten Uithoekje' in *De Hollandsche Lelie* represented Kartini's first real introduction to a metropolitan Dutch readership. It publicly associated Kartini with both Rosa Abendanon and Nellie van Kol. The editorial introduction provided the article gives further evidence of the celebrity status that Kartini was achieving in the Netherlands, and is therefore appended here, with Nellie's comments, in full.

An Indies Cloverleaf[2]

We recently received through the intermediary of Mevrouw Abendanon in Batavia a contribution for *Eigen Haard* which we hope will greatly interest our readers. The article is written by Raden Ajeng Kartini, a daughter of the Regent of Jepara and someone interested in native woodcarving produced by several extraordinarily talented families in Jepara.

The Regent of Jepara is, just like his brother, the Regent of Demak,[3] a man who, without sacrificing any of the Javanese traditions which distinguish Javanese of noble birth, without in any way diminishing the prestige he has as regent in the eyes of the Native population, is conscious of the great advantages of European civilization and education. One of his sons, if we remember well, studied in Delft.[4] A second son, Raden Mas Kartono, is currently studying in Leiden and very likely soon also two of his highly cultivated daughters will be coming to Holland to get an education which is not available for them in their Indies homeland.

We knew that Mevrouw Nellie van Kol was well acquainted with these Indies ladies. We turned to her with a request to provide some information about the contributor of the article to *Eigen Haard*, and if possible, also provide

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2 *Eigen Haard*, 3 January 1903: 10–11.

3 RMAA Hadiningrat had been famously introduced to Dutch readers by an article by Conrad van Deventer.

4 The editor is confused here about a second son studying in the Netherlands. There is a clear assumption that Kartini and Roekmini will be coming to the Netherlands.

us with a portrait photograph of Raden Ajeng Kartini to reproduce in *Eigen Haard*. Instead of a portrait photograph Mevrouw van Kol sent us one of the entire cloverleaf, 'But' she added, 'I don't know whether I have the right to provide it for reproduction. If this is your intention then I hope you will take complete responsibility for it.' This of course we are happy to do in the hope that the Indies ladies will tolerate this impertinence – which journalist was ever polite?[5]

We now reprint what Mevrouw van Kol wrote about the trio:

> I have got to know the ladies Kartini and Roekmini through corresponding.[6] I have no hesitation in ranking them amongst the most cultivated and noble women whom I have had the privilege of meeting in my life. In every country and in every religion they would belong to the spiritual elite. I cannot support my assertion by pointing to particular things which they may already have done; but those who have already been corresponding with them for years or who have had personal contact with them, have the impression that these young women are destined to achieve something great. Certainly not in the field of literature, even if the lady Kartini writes in an almost perfect Dutch and even if her style of writing vibrates (at least in her confidential letters) with everything that has inspired her. Nor in the field of the arts, even though they, and lady Roekmini in particular, burn with enthusiasm about the artistic products and the innate artistic talent of their compatriots. But certainly [I can] in the field of the intellectual and moral education and the emancipation of the women of their people.
>
> For their sake I should not praise these women to the sky, especially not to an audience that hardly know them yet. But I will and can guarantee that the girls are worthy for the most noble-minded of our country to interest themselves in them and their aims. I therefore hope sincerely that her first article in *Eigen Haard* will be followed by others of a similar nature which undoubtedly will similarly give evidence of the cherished dreams and ideals they hold and which inspire them.
>
> Attempts to enable her to undertake her education at government expense in Europe have been made. And if these should succeed, the passionate

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5 It appears permission was not obtained prior to publication. See Kartini's letter of 7 June 1903.

6 Note by *Eigen Haard* editor: A third sister, lady Kardinah, completely at one in terms of her ideas and feelings with the others, was recently married.

> love, the fiery commitment and the great talent of these girls will be of benefit their Javanese sisters at large.
>
> As a pleasing sign of the times I might perhaps here mention that I have also received a letter from a Minahassan girl, a young thing of sixteen, full of hopes of working for her people.[7] If we consider these two cases together, I would say that something is stirring in the faraway East Indies, that a spiritual harvest is beginning to ripen and that it is high time that the best amongst us provide moral and practical support for these young workers that are beginning to emerge.
>
> May your good journal actively contribute to this end.

The editors added in a final response to Nellie's profuse words of introduction:

> Certainly, we will gladly do so. And if we should receive more contributions, as attractive as that which Raden Ajeng Kartini has just sent us, it will be a welcome and greatly appreciated acquisition for the readers of *Eigen Haard*.

[7] This may be a reference to Eti Wawu Runtu about whom Kartini had also heard.

A GOVERNOR GENERAL'S DAY[1]

Tiga Saudara

I

I will never forget that wonderful May morning when I happily set out on my journey to Semarang in order to experience a festive day such as did not happen every year and would certainly not do so again in the coming years! I can still see us sitting in the large public carriage, packed in like herrings but with faces so happy and excited as if we were sitting in comfort on the beautifully sprung cushions of a landau and not on the hard bench of a worthless carriage that looked grey with age! We didn't feel anything of the hardness, nor were we hindered by having to sit so close together that we could hardly move. On the contrary, we thought it was quite enjoyable because we could hear each other better when we spoke.

The chatter and the laughter continued the entire long journey, from the time we left home until we arrived at the station an hour away. There was so much to talk about, so much cause for merriment. To Semarang! Just those two little words, perhaps of insignificance to others, for us conjured up a world of wonder!

Semarang! It was the magical world of our childhood years! I can still remember so well the great, great joy that I experienced for the first time when, years ago, as only a little fellow, I steamed into that magical city where my brothers were going to school and about which we had heard so many wonderful things from people we knew who came from there. At that time I only stayed a few hours yet how much time I needed afterwards to tell about everything I had seen and experienced in that Paradise.

'Mummy, how many officials live there then?' asked a little country girl recently who had visited Semarang for the first time with her parents and saw all the large houses on Bojong Street.

Little poppet, how you awakened memories in me! That first time I had thought our Semarang niece very ignorant when every time a carriage raced past and I asked her who owned it she had continually answered, 'I don't know'. With us here, every child could tell you the owner of every carriage that went past.

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[1] 'Een Gouverneur Generaals Dag', *De Echo*, Yogyakarta, 1900.

Another time, after that first occasion, and after quite a period of time, we saw Semarang again. I could still recognize everything but how that Eden of before had changed! No, it was not you, you busy, noisy Semarang, with your beautiful rows of houses, your shops, your countless beautiful carriages and horses, your trams, your soldiers – you had stayed the same, yes, had even become more beautiful. But where was the glow and that special charm with which I had anointed you in my memory? …

'And girls,' our friend asked, full of expectation, when we had returned to Damarsarie. 'How was Semarang?'

'Just ordinary!'

Two large blue eyes looked startled and then looked at us full of surprise.

'What?'

'It was just ordinary!'

'Oh children! What a pity! My husband and I had so hoped that you would enjoy Semarang. You so rarely go out – there is nothing here – so we thought that you would return absolutely delighted.'

'Oh certainly Mevrouwtje, we enjoyed it tremendously! But you asked how Semarang was – well it was just as usual! Before it had seemed to us so wonderfully beautiful, or at least on that occasion we had such a very different impression of it than you.'

'And that is an impression you have faithfully retained?'

'Yes!'

The clear blue eyes laughed again and from the fresh red lips of our friend we heard: 'Oh, you dreamers, you silly things. You want to see Semarang now with the same eyes of a ten year old? You wanted to get the same impression that you were left with when you were there as little mites years ago.'

* * * *

We were off to see Semarang again now for the third time! And we were curious what kind of impression it would make on us now that Semarang was dressed up in festive attire in honour of the visit of the Governor General and Mrs Rooseboom to the city.

How a certain pair of black eyes shone when in March Moedertje asked us: 'Have you heard the big news already? In May the Governor General will be coming to Semarang. Would you like to go there?'

'Oh Mama!' we cried out in excitement. In the twinkling of an eye Moeder's lap was filled with arms and heads. 'You really don't need to ask us that, you knew beforehand what our answer would be.'

You could not see mama; she was completely hidden beneath her daughters. In the first few minutes nothing could be heard but the voices calling out 'Wonderful!' 'Heavenly!' 'Divine!'

'Mummy,' a voice called out when the excited exclamations had calmed somewhat. 'We are really going, aren't we? You have truly promised.'

'Hey, hey, calm down a little,' mama laughed, 'I haven't promised anything missy.'

'But you asked us if we wanted to go, didn't you?'

'Yes, but asking is not the same as promising.'

'Well, promised or not promised, you will do it Mummy, won't you?' asked someone else who then continued in a sweet, flattering voice. 'Yes Moedertje dearest, you will go to Semarang in May and then you will take all your daughters with you for company, won't you. Go on Moedertje, just say yes. It's not every year, not even every ten years, that a governor general comes to our neighbourhood. Surely once in our lives we should see a G.G. and now that such a wonderful opportunity presents itself shouldn't you take advantage of it?'

'Mummy it would be such a waste!'

Mama clamped her hands over her ears. 'Please. That's enough. We will think about it.'

'"Oh you are a dot! An angel!'

'Go on with you! Just make sure you behave yourselves and we will see!'

'Fine, Mama. You will have nothing to complain about! We promise on our honour not to bring a caterpillar into our room for a whole month, not to swing too high and better still, we won't even touch the swing. In the evening we won't sit too close to the lamp; we won't read in bed. Won't eat rujak!'…

What a flurry of activity had preceded the journey. Day after day it was cutting, sewing and trying on! We did not want to present ourselves in Semarang as Cinderellas. The sewing machine purred away smoothly all day long accompanying the cheerful babble of the diligent sewers.

And then, on the day of departure, the wonderful experience of packing, a particularly pleasant task for those who don't do it often! Our room looked like a second-hand shop: the entire contents of the wardrobe had been turned out, either on the floor, on the bed, on tables, on chairs, over sampirans. Things were being pushed into the already overfull suitcase until the last moment. I can still see the faces of my sisters, fiery red with exertion, bending over them. They were desperate that it didn't want to close. Only when Sélan and I sat on it with all our 100-kilo weight could we get the overly stretched lid closed. A loud and relieved 'Thank God' escaped from Tari's lips when she could

finally slip the key of the suitcase in her travel bag. A still more profound 'Thank God!' was on many lips when the barang-barang was loaded in the carts and their owners were finally settled in the carriage. The journey across Damarsarie's beautiful roads was wonderful, along beautiful lanes of assem trees, along waving padi fields of emerald green and gold, past rich sugarcane fields with their waving grey plumes! And when in the empty lanes we from time to time met coming the other way a mob of karbouw sauntering along under the watchful eye of a young kacong, or a cart fully laden with hay, or a troop of men, women and children with sheaves of padi on their backs, or just occasionally a cart transporting Chinese or Natives, there were sounds of the whip being cracked and the warning shouts of the runner.

The tram had not yet arrived when we got to the station. Behind us a farm bendie came to a stop and out climbed a gentleman in muddy work clothes and on bare 'kakies'. In a few short strides he was beside us and poked his head through the window:

'Hello!' he said, greeting us. 'Eh, where are you going?'

'To Semarang to celebrate! Are you coming too?'

'I wish I could. Trouble is, it has just turned dinner time! A Governor General's Day must be fun to see!'

'It sure is. Why don't you pack up your goods and come with us?'

'And what about the boss?'

'Come on, can't you get time off because of the important occasion? I would have thought that the arrival of the Governor General would have been of great importance.'

'I wished the boss would see it that way too! But no, we poor unfortunates just have to work hard. Even if H.M the Queen came here in person. Even during mealtimes, we factory workers can only look on while others are having fun. Tidak boleh.'

He gallantly helped mama out of the carriage and escorted her to the tram.

'Are you sure you haven't forgotten anything?' he asked Father, 'no children left behind in the carriage, no barang in the cart?'

'One, two, three, four, five,' he counted. 'All in order, Regent, all your treasures are safely in the tram. And now, adieu ladies. Regent, the mandurs are waiting for me. Have a good time in Semarang. Greet the Governor General for me. Goodbye!'

'We will, don't you worry!' we called out to him merrily as the light-skinned gardener flew past us.

Tingelingeling! It was the third time the tram bell rang. The fat conductor heaved himself into one of the carriages with much difficulty, blew shrilly on

his whistle and the tram set off. We looked at each other happily! It was such a treat for us to be sitting in the tram – we were delighted, it occurred so rarely! We continually looked out of the windows to appreciate the often beautiful landscape which we were flying past, and to wave a hello to the people we knew who lived along the tramline, which we thought was so nice.

When we reached K[udus], where the tram stopped for a long time, we stepped out and visited some friends. We learned that the Residents, Assistant Residents, the controleurs and the Regents of the area here had already passed through on an earlier tram.

'That's good,' Father said, 'now we can have a carriage to ourselves. As far as I am concerned you can keep the pleasure of being squashed together in this heat!'

The tram we now took was endless because several extra carriages were attached to it. At each station new passengers came on and very soon all the first and second-class carriages were completely full. In the neighbourhood of Semarang the tram stopped almost every minute to take on board a large number of men armed with flags. When there was no place left in the passenger carriages the new passengers were simply put in the baggage wagon. That didn't seem to bother them at all because regularly, after leaving each stop, there was a loud hooray from these makeshift passenger carriages.

The tram steamed into Semarang.

'Oh look!' sister called out excitedly, 'there are flags everywhere! It looks so cheerful!'

'And look over there,' cried another voice, 'Don't you think that's such a sweet gateway? There, there in front of that house.'

I didn't know who to listen to and where I had to look. Hardly had one of the sisters pulled me to one window then another pulled me over to another corner. Even Father joined in.

'Do you see that?' said Father pointing to a bridge. 'That is the Oosterbanjir Canal which will be visited the day after tomorrow by the Tuan Besar.'[2]

A little later it was: 'That will also be inspected by His Exc.'

'What, Father?'

'That building over there, with the flags and wimples. It's the Soeria Soemirat.'[3]

The station buildings came in sight, the locomotive decreased speed and a little later the long line of carriages stood still. In an instant the station, which

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2 Literally the big (important) man, ie the Governor General.

3 Soeria Soemirat was a self-help association to support poor European residents of Semarang.

was by no means deserted, became black with people. We got out. With great difficulty we beat a path through the black sea of people to the street outside where it was swarming with carriages. In all the confusion we could hear men were calling out 'Loosmen Bojong!' 'Loosman Capalioon' 'Loosman Djansen' (Lodging house Bojong, Pavilyun, Jansen).[4]

My sister anxiously held my hand. I myself didn't like it either; I was not used to being in the middle of such a throng.

A coachman came towards us and asked: 'Kanjeng Darmansarie?'[5]

'Yes!'

'Here are your carriages.'

II

A man took us to some covered wagons whose the canvas sides had been rolled up. Wonderful, it meant we could look out from all sides.

'Sir to the kota,' was the command when we were all seated in the wagon. The barang-barang would be organized by our boy who stayed at the station.

Everywhere the cheerful tricolour was flapping from roofs and amongst them weaved the fiery orange tongues of streamers. The Semarang white-washers had worked hard: there was not a wall along the road that was not sparkling white, even the tar on the road was not spared.

All that sparkling white contrasting with the shiny black, the green with which many houses were decorated and the waves of red, white, blue and orange gave everything a really merry, festive look.

'Sir, to Bojong,' was the command when we had done our shopping in the city. The trip through the festively decorated Bojong Road was a delight. The guard houses here and there had been freshly repainted in green and topped with a flag. Behind the rustling yellow palm leaves which defined the entrances to the houses, one could see the gleam of the bronze of gamelan. The sight of all this decoration, everywhere one looked truly put us into a festive mood.

'How beautiful!' came a chorus of voices from the covered wagon in which these country folk were sitting when, in the distance the truly finely decorated archway of honour on the Society Bridge came into view. We could not believe our eyes.

'That's where you will be dancing tomorrow evening!' Father said pointing out to us a beautifully decorated building in front of which a number of

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4 Kartini adds words in parentheses to emphasize the mispronunciation.

5 Literally Lord Darmansarie, referring to the regent of Darmansarie.

Europeans and Inlanders were standing. A heap of greenery was lying on the ground and through the open door we could see men standing on ladders against the wall. The building, with all that green and the flags with which it was festooned was already quite festive but the red velvet with contrasting gold canopy in the main entrance gave it a most dignified appearance. It was the Harmonie![6]

I pinched my neighbour's arm and asked: 'What do you think of it? Tell me, will you dare to go dancing here tomorrow evening?'

Sister didn't answer but made a surly face. I knew what that meant: don't think about tomorrow, tomorrow will look after itself. But in my heart I wasn't as sanguine as I made out to be. The richest and best-decorated building made me anxious, gave me goosebumps thinking about the gala ball tomorrow evening. How will it go? I thought anxiously. We don't know anything about Semarang, know almost nobody, the Harmonie is a total mystery to us and then the gala ball is in honour of the Governor General; so many important people will be coming! What have we done coming here, dear friendly Damansarie, with your ordinary folk, your simple interiors, and your cosy family celebrations? If only we had not left you! But there is nothing to be done about it now my girl, if you do 'a' then you must also do 'b'.

It was fortunate that there was so much to see along the rest of the way so that our thoughts about the feared Harmonie were distracted. And when, a little later, we stopped outside the Hotel Pavillioen, astounded to see its festive entrance, our problems were already half-forgotten. But when we finally arrived at the home of the Coler family where we were lodging and Mevrouw asked us if we were going to the ball the next day, the worries began again, especially when we discovered that none of the ladies of the house were going. We had so depended on the assumption that we would have their company at the festivity so that we would have at least someone who knew Semarang and its public and who could guide us through the gathering at the Harmonie.

That evening our parents made some visits and we three went out on our own to visit some people we knew.

'Will you be going to the Harmonie?' was almost the first question we asked them.

'No, girls,' was the response of our first host.

'Oh, why not Mevrouw?'

'My husband can't come.'

'Then you can go with us.'

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[6] Harmonie, the European club and theatre, centre of the European social life in Semarang.

'That would have been possible if there wasn't another problem.'

'And, what is that?'

'I don't have a long, low-cut gown and, you know, the dress code is "gala".'

'Well it's not looking good for us, not having any people we know, particularly at such a stiflingly dignified occasion as a gala!'

'Oh don't be silly! It won't be so bad. The Harmonie is not that large, you certainly won't get lost in it.'

With this cold comfort we went on to other acquaintances. Here we had better luck, the entire family, including a married daughter who we knew quite well and who was staying with her parents while recovering from an illness, were going.

'Initially I had not planned to go,' the young woman said, 'I just wanted to see the beautiful garden and had already decided on a fine high-necked gown but then I discovered that even in the garden you had to be décolleté. Well, in that case I would much rather go inside than be outside in the garden with a bare neck and shoulders and risk the chance of catching a bad cold.'

'You're right!'

'But tell me, what will you be wearing tomorrow evening?'

'The usual, kain and kebaya as always. Or would you want to dress us in a décolleté gown as well?'

'Well no, but you do have to go to a gala.'

'We don't have gala clothes.'

'What about Solo or Jogya court attire then?'

'Oh but we are not obliged to wear that here. We women of the coast don't have formal attire. Here a woman only wears courtly dress once in her life – that is, when she gets married. I don't intend to appear in public in such a light costume which leaves your neck, arms and shoulders completely uncovered to below your armpits. Here, you would only go dressed in public like that if you are a bride or … a ronggeng!'[7]

The 'till tomorrow evening' had never sounded so good as that evening when we took our leave from the Potter family.

We returned to the Coler family house much brighter than when we had left, encouraged by the thought that the following evening, amongst the hundreds of strangers there would at least be a couple of faces smiling at us. After dinner we immediately crawled into bed to emerge the next morning bright and early. It was still dark when we ventured out and we had to feel our way to the bathroom in order to chase away Mr Sandman who was still

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7 That is, a professional dancer and often woman of ill-repute.

caressing our eyes. It had just struck half past four when we emerged fresh and wide awake on the front veranda of the pavilion where we were staying. Father was already waiting for us and suggested we go for a short walk up the street, an invitation we eagerly accepted.

III

Carriages with their lanterns still burning were continually rushing past and large crowds of well-dressed men, holding flags occupied the street.

'Pa, will the Mossel have arrived yet?' I asked.

'Of course child, a long time ago. It's already after five and the boat will have arrived around 3 o'clock.' Father had barely finished speaking when a loud 'boom!' sounded.

'What is that?' father exclaimed.

'The morning cannon shot, Pa?'

'No, that was let off some time ago. Papa was mistaken. The Mossel has only just arrived now, that shot was the signal. Well, that steamer is not particularly fast! I thought it would have been at anchor at least an hour ago. Anyway, let's go back now.'

'Boom!' another shot and after a while another one. It meant that the agreed signal of three cannon shots fired from Fort Oranje Nassau when a boat with important guests was in view had now been given.

The men with flags who we met were now no longer walking but running along the Bojong Road. 'Ayo men, hurry up, ajo!' Tari said laughing out loud, 'Kanjeng Tuan Besar has already arrived; you will come too late for the guard of honour.' It was such a ridiculous sight, seeing these fellows running as though chased by the devil. They were supposed to be gathering at the Kali Baru to form a guard of honour.

'Good morning!' we heard as we entered our host's property. In the meantime the entire house was up and about, in front the son of the house and one of the young ladies were busy raising the flag on the flagpole.

'Can we give you a hand?' we asked and without waiting for an answer we began to fiddle with the orange cloth which seemed to not want to be attached to the rope.

'Beg pardon ladies, I think you are pulling too hard, the string will break in a minute.'

'Doesn't matter, we can just knot it together!'

Finally the red, white, blue and orange material went up and now, from our host's property too, the tricolour and the orange streamer began to flutter to

later join the hundreds of other flags and wimples to give a 'hearty welcome to Semarang' to our important guests.

Two, three, four soldiers came down the street soon followed by others, and behind them some on bicycles or horse and cart. They were Native boys with rifles over their shoulder.

'I like the way those soldiers are walking,' I remarked. 'What company do they belong to?'

'They aren't soldiers,' Heer Coler replied with a laugh. 'They would like to be, to just go out and march any old how and go by bicycle and horse and cart with servants carrying their rifles behind them. They are the civil guard, you can tell. In the first place because of the uncoordinated way they are walking, one here, two over there, there a group of four, and secondly by the orange colours they are wearing.'

'Well feel free to laugh at us! We provincials know nothing about all that!' 'Girls!' called Ma from the house. 'It's time for you to change your pakian.'

At this we flew into the pavilion and quickly disappeared into our rooms.

'Quick, quick!' was the order but we had laid out everything the night before so we did not have to rummage around in our suitcases. While our nervous fingers tried to pin up our kebaya and run hairpins into our hair we heard drumbeats and trumpet wails and immediately afterwards knocks on the door. Father's voice called out: 'Quick children, the soldiers are coming past, come and look!' The closed door flew open and we stormed outside. Sélan was still holding a hairpin in her hand, Tari had both hands at her ear in the middle of screwing an earring tight and I was holding my jacket closed with my hand which was still holding two pins, a packet of pins in the other. Our hostess and our parents laughed heartily on seeing us in this state, but we didn't care a jot about this. We just rushed out to the front to the little bridge that separated the front yard from the street. A huge endless black procession was moving along the road, the ground rumbled with the sound of the many feet of the hundreds of soldiers hitting the ground in unison.

'Those are real soldiers,' laughed Heer Coler. 'That is the infantry. What a difference with those from before, eh?' Well it certainly was different!

'How very, very nice!' cried Tari joyfully, for the umpteenth time. 'I just can't get enough of looking at that fine, orderly marching. I would love to march with them.'

'Halt!' ordered the commandant. As if by magic the whole procession stopped dead. 'Left turn!' the order sounded. Rrt! and all hundred men turned left.

'That was good, don't you think?' asked Heer Coler.

'We are in raptures about it!' and certainly the look on our faces did not contradict us. It was of course the first time in our lives that we had seen a battalion of soldiers. How sad for people as old as we were! But it was better this way, now we were enjoying it even more, while it left others, for whom this was a daily spectacle, completely cold. That was the privilege of desa children, who lived isolated from the rest of the world: the least thing gives us immense pleasure.

'We are going to get martial music in our neighbourhood,' Heer Coler told us.

'Wonderful!' we three cried as one. Music is such a joy for us and we can never, never get enough of it.

Commands were given, the troop split and arranged themselves in two facing each other separated by about three or four meters on either side of the road, leaving enough room for passers-by. The soldiers then moved a little apart from each other. I watched the movements of these sons of Mars with interest: the gold on their helmets and steel bayonets glittered in the sunlight. I looked and looked … and my thoughts wandered far away from Semarang to the blue sea of the South African coast, that bloody battlefield, to scenes of bitter wretchedness, heavy and terrible suffering, to the thousands of unfortunates, victims of England's shameful, all conquering greed…

A hand was placed on my shoulder and at my ear a voice said: 'Why are you standing there as in a trance. Are you perhaps dreaming about the soldiers?'

'Yes!' I said matter-of-factly.

'Ha! We have someone here who is dreaming with eyes wide open and in clear daylight – of soldiers, in fact!' A burst of laughter followed that completely shook me out of my dream.

'And, which one is that hero that made such an impression on my dear sister? That one over there with the mournful face? Just right for you!' my sister teased.

IV

Dear hearts, if only you knew how infinitely far what you imagined was from my thoughts even though you are standing right next to me! I replied cheerily in the same tone to her sarcasm: 'No, not that one. I am no admirer of such insignificant-looking people, my idol is tall and big and strong! Do you see that giant over there, with that bright red face, wonderful hooked nose and that friendly blond moustache? That is my flame! But I am tired of standing, I'm going to sit down!'

Acting on my word I let myself drop down on the railing of the bridge. I was sitting comfortably when Heer Coler, seeing me there, called out in fright: 'Oh God! Please don't sit there!'

I jumped up immediately but – it was too late. My kain remained stuck to the recently tarred wall and my new clothes were ruined!

'Oh, it's nothing!' I said, trying to put Heer Coler who was still looking with concern at the ruination of my kain, at ease. 'I am happy to sacrifice a kain for the pleasure I have had this morning and will still enjoy today!'

'And also tarred hands!' Sélan called out laughing, showing the black tops of her fingers.

Heer Coler had already run inside to reappear very soon with a boy carrying a chair.

'Go on now,' said mama, 'change into another kain. And you, kleintje, go and wash your hands.'

'Certainly will not Mama,' the tarred duo protested. 'We can easily stay like this. Mevrouw Roosenboom will certainly not notice.'

We didn't want to miss anything of what was going past, the unending stream of people following the soldiers, and the endless procession of carriages that passed between the guard of honour. The Bojong Road, with its festive decorations, its heaving crowds of people, its countless carriages, the cyclists loudly ringing their bells, presented such a merry sight. All nations were represented: Europeans, Inlanders, Chinese, Africans, Arabs, Moors swarmed together in one great confusion. The rattle of the wheels and tramp of the hooves added a certain cachet to the festive feel. At one moment a beautiful landau, pulled by some fine Sydniers,[8] zoomed past. In it sat a rich Baba with spouse and his offspring, the corpulent mother in sarong and kebaya, the youthful sprites in European fantasy suits. The charming daughters with their soft cream-coloured faces and glittering dark almond eyes, were dressed in gowns – it was only a pity that their black locks had also not been transformed, because their shiny oiled hair made into a Chinese coiffure and stuck full with jewels contrasted rather strangely with the European clothing. A milord rattled past filled with fine looking Moors dressed in their own attractive, colourful national dress, and then a wagon rolled past filled with neatly attired Inlandsche men and women. Later on a four-wheeled carriage came by filled with men dressed in black with white ties and gloves. A shimmer of uniforms, a gleam of silk hats, bright white shirts framed in dull black, and gleam of gold and gold-striped payongs, a riot of colourful ladies' gowns passed by us in an

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[8] Name given to a breed of large Australian horse.

unbroken stream. Private citizens, officials, officers, Native officials, captains of the Foreign Oriental communities, all dressed in full uniform were making their way to the official residence of the Resident to await the arrival of the G.G. and to be presented to His Exc.

We continually looked back to see if father was ready – the carriage had been waiting already for some time and so many people had already arrived.

'Your Papa could hurry up a bit,' warned Heer Coler. 'Soon they will be closing the road for carriages and then your Papa will have to walk to the official residence.'

How relieved then we were when finally we saw father sitting in one of the carriages rolling down the Bojong Road.

'Hello Father, see you later!'

'Eh, what is that?' Tari asked, pointing to a troop of girls dressed in white, which just then came marching behind a group of soldiers. The two at the front were wearing orange sashes. One carried a beautiful bouquet from which a long ribbon with an inscription was dangling, the other held a parasol with which she was protecting the flowers.

'Orphan girls,' Heer Coler explained. 'Later they will sing for the important guests and present Mevrouw Roosenboom with a flower tribute.'

'Where will that take place?'

'A long way from here, unfortunately! Otherwise it would have been nice for you to see how all that takes place.'

A little later a troop of boys came past. 'Also orphan children,' Heer Coler explained again. 'They will also be singing for the important guests. Again it is a pity that the place where they will be singing is so far away from here.'

'Oh it doesn't matter. We can't have everything at once. Let's just be thankful that we have such a good spot here from which we later get such a good view of the official procession.'

'Oh God, sis! Look at that!' cried Sélan with delight and pulled me over to look. 'Have you ever seen anything so silly?' I turned to look in the direction she indicated and Sélan was right. A sillier sight one could not have imagined than the sight presented by a group of African beauties dressed in pure white dresses decorated with green ribbons, with brush-like short curly hair tied back with green ribbons which made us think of sapu injuk (brooms) who had rolling eyes, the whites of which contrasted starkly with the jet-black eyelids; they were enough to scare one.

'We are going to look like that too – in dresses,' I whispered to my sister.

'Yes I know,' she laughed, 'and that's why I am never in my life going to wear a gown.'

'Yu (sister)', shouted my sister, 'you can imagine how the procession of the G.G. is going to be photographed later. Just look at the number of amateurs hanging about!' Gentlemen with hand-held cameras were passing by. 'And those gentlemen will be providing reports on what takes place,' laughed Sélan when, a little later, some gentlemen armed with briefcases passed by.

'Take care you don't get photographed yourself,' warned Heer Coler. Opposite us a Chinese photographer was setting up his instrument.

Around 8 o'clock the stream of carriages along the Bojong Road ceased. No more carriages were being permitted: the guard of honour closed the road in readiness for the important guests.

Boom! Sélan grasped my arm anxiously and asked with glittering eyes: 'Sister, do you hear that? The Governor General has landed!'

Boom! Boom! What a fine sound those cannons can make, at least when it is intended to add to the festive mood! Each shot sent a small thrill through my heart. Where do you want to take me, cannon thunder? My thoughts waver between scenes of terror and of bright sunshine, full of flag-waving, green and floral decorations…

(Incomplete – final section was unavailable.)

A WARSHIP AT ANCHOR[1]

I

'Oh, what a shame!'

'What is?'

'Here, read it yourself!' With these words I handed the note I had just received to my sister. She had hardly glanced at it before she threw it to the ground in an angry gesture and exclaimed in an irritated voice: 'Oh, how annoying! Today it's just such wonderful weather to go out and now that nuisance is coming to ruin our fun, sinking the plan we had. So we dressed up in these clothes for nothing.'

The innocent pink cotton dress the slender figure was dressed in received a firm tug.

'What? You don't mean to say, do you, that our little excursion is not going to go ahead?' my youngest sister asked, anxiously.

To which Sélan answered curtly: 'I didn't. Mevrouw Felders has.'

'Oh dear,' sulked Tari, 'I have been so looking forward to it, for days now.'

'Yes, children,' I joined in, 'it is annoying. But do you think Mevrouw Felders liked having to cancel our arrangement? She herself had anticipated just a lovely day. You surely couldn't expect her to leave her old uncle who was good enough to come all the way from Semarang just to see her, alone in the house while she went off and had fun with others, could you?'

'That would serve him right! Why couldn't he have come another day?'

'But sister dear,' I continued reproaching her, 'how could he know that it was today that his niece had made an arrangement to go out with her three easily-upsettable girlfriends? He came unexpectedly.'

'But it is…'

'Sis! Sis!' With a loud bang the door of our room flew open and in stormed a boy of about six years of age, completely out of breath.

'Sis!! Sis!' he repeated, still out of breath, 'there is … there is a warship in the harbour.'

'A warship, do you hear me?' For a moment he stopped to catch his breath and then continued excitedly: 'I went out with Pa and at the market I saw

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1 'Een Oorlogsschip op de Ree', *De Echo*, Yogyakarta, 1900.

many, many white sailors and two men from the ship have come back with us. Come Sis, come quick and have a look! They are sitting out in the bow!'

Then with all his boyish strength the little fellow dragged his big sister with him to the inner gallery from which one could see the alun-alun. There were two figures dressed in white and wearing helmets, sauntering across the yard in front of the kabupaten. For a while they moved out of sight, the thick pillars and flowerpots blocked our view, but when they reappeared we saw father at their side who accompanied them to the front gallery.

As he passed by us Father glanced at me and I could see his disapproval.

Goodness me, what had I done! Then suddenly it occurred to me how silly and childish and unladylike it was for me to be there. Was this supposed to be a 'young lady', who was standing there in the doorway, curiously staring at the new guests who were not more than ten feet away?

Embarrassed, I ran off to think over the sin I had just committed. What had got into me to follow my little brother? A warship, here, in the harbour of this forgotten corner? Something more absurd could hardly be imagined! But who could those two strangers with father be.

'It's true, Sis,' my little brother who had fled back inside with me, reassured seriously, 'they are people from the kapal-perang (warship).'

'Oh, you with your kapal-perang, they were just teasing you, little man. Those gentlemen looking anything but sailor-like, they must be people from the water board to survey the house or something. You know, don't you, that they are planning to extend the pendopo?'

'No sis, they really are mariners,' my little brother maintained and undoubtedly the little fellow would have exercised all his reasoning powers to convince me of the truth of what he was saying, had there not at that moment been a knock on the door that cut him short.

'The young ladies are requested to come to the front,' the houseboy announced. Sélan poked her head around the door:

'Who sent you?'

'Your father.'

Just moments later we were sitting comfortably in rocking chairs in the front gallery in the company of a couple of … officers from HMS *Borneo*.

So, our little brother was right after all! There really was a warship in the harbour! Since childhood the sea had always been a source of fascination for us, children born by the sea! We were intensely interested in everything associated with the sea. 'A warship! A warship!' resounded continually and joyfully in my ears.

Oh, quiet, forgotten little town on the coast, where nothing and no one ever comes, realize the great privilege that has befallen you! One of Her Majesty's proud castles of the sea has been pleased to sail into your waters, to drop anchor in your harbour! A warm feeling of pleasant surprise and happiness came over me when, as we were being introduced, I heard my father say 'officers of HMS *Borneo*'. I could not believe my ears, I thought I was dreaming. Businesslike, I sat down next to them, my eyes wide open … But what I thought might have been a dream did not disappear. The gentlemen remained sitting in their chairs, talking and laughing…

But what, how did they come to land here? Had their ship ended up here because it had got lost? Was there a shipwreck perhaps? Are these survivors of a shipwreck?

As though they guessed what thoughts were going through my head the eldest of the two told us:

'We come from Palembang and our destination is Surabaya. But we have to stay here for a few days to check on some reefs around the Karimun Djawa Islands. No doubt you have heard about the accident that the *Holland* had when, in the neighbourhood of the Boompjes Islands, it hit some unknown reefs? Well, the government wants to prevent any repeat of such an accident and so we were sent here. And the Captain thought it would be nice, since our ship is lying so close to Jepara, to take the opportunity to have a look at the town.'

So, one of the riddles has been solved! But how was it that the officers came here? Had the Captain sent them here? Did they have some duty to fulfil?

No, no, nothing like that. The fact that it was not an official visit was already clear from what the officers were wearing.

The fact that they were sitting here amongst us was the result of a funny mistake which neither they nor we could have imagined!

II

Father had been out riding and on his return saw a group of unknown gentlemen in the field in front of our house. On father's approach the majority turned and went another way but two of them followed papa's carriage, thinking that the road into the Kabupaten was a public way and the vast field, completely covered in crotons[2] and flowering shrubs, was the town park, while the pendopo, so welcoming with all its sides open, they thought might have been some kind of building open to the public. Without giving it a thought

[2] Codiaeum Variegatum

the strangers strolled through the gateway and walked up one of the pathways but then … which way had the carriage gone? Their footsteps across the white gravel stones became more hesitant.

Father had already got out of the carriage some time before and was waiting in the pendopo for what he believed was an intended visit. However it appeared that the walkers did not intend to take the steps leading into the house and continued to wander around. Then father sent someone to them to ask them to come in.

One can imagine the shock the officers experienced when they became aware of their mistake and realized that they found themselves on the property of an inhabited house. They had followed a complete stranger to his house and … and indeed it was a total stranger in every sense of the word because the court that they had penetrated belonged not to a countryman or fellow European but to an Inlander. A second servant joined the first informing the gentlemen that the kapubaten was at their disposal and that the Regent would be pleased to receive them.

The invitation was so friendly and generous that refusal would have been difficult and extremely impolite… since they had come here of their own accord. But … but they had never been to Java, knew neither the language nor the customs of the country and only spoke very limited Malay. They could neither step forwards nor backwards … But oh goodness, along came the master of the house, down the steps directly towards them. Now there was no possibility of avoiding it. Hesitantly they approached but how surprised and amazed they were when they were addressed not in Malay as they had feared but in their own familiar language!

'We are really in luck,' laughed one of the officers. 'How relieved I was when I heard your father a little while ago speaking Dutch. Our situation then was most unfortunate I can assure you! We were rather embarrassed before!'

We sat there chatting so pleasantly as though we had known each other for years.

We talked about all kinds of things in a free and unrestrained manner without the least trace of formality. They asked about our town and we proudly took them for a tour of the house, proud about our beautiful woodcarving that can be admired everywhere in our kabupaten. They really are works of art that only our Jepara carpenters are able to create!

'These would be beautiful objects to send to the Netherlands isn't that so?' I suggested, pointing to some lovely photograph and sewing boxes.

'Yes, beautiful,' agreed Lieutenant Elbers, 'but I have stopped sending things home.'

'Why?'

'I did so once but then they made such fun of me that I won't be doing it for the second time.'

'But what did you send then?'

'Kantjes.[3] I thought these would be quite exceptional in Holland because they were made in the Indies. But then, they wrote back to me that I could have better kept my present to myself because they could find these kinds of things anywhere in the cheapest shop for a couple of cents.'

The hours flew by as we were pleasantly chin-wagging and before we knew it the clock on the residence of the Assistant Resident struck twelve. Embarrassed, Lieutenant Elbers jumped up from his seat nodding to his friend: 'Well Kanter, what do you think? We should not make our captain wait.'

Both gentlemen stood up and Heer Kanter said in a gracious tone: 'You would do us a great honour, Regent, if you and the ladies would visit us on board. The captain and we would bid you a hearty welcome.'

On their departure we knew that the formal 'It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance' declared on both sides was no mere hollow formality.

III

Silently we three returned to our room after they left, unable to immediately say anything; we were still so wrapped up in what we had just experienced, we just stared at each other. But when Tari's voice broke the silence with 'Did we dream that? Have we actually been talking to marine officers? Is there really a warship?' then a storm of excited and happy exclamations broke out. Gone was the disappointment from earlier in the morning; gone the pouting lips and in their place faces full of laughter and sunshine! Sélan's eye caught sight of the note that had earlier been angrily thrown to the floor and picking it up, she held it high above her head and called out: 'Long live the dear old grump!'

'Well that's what you are saying now!' laughed Tari and I. But sister took no notice of our teasing.

'Oh, I am so grateful,' she continued excitedly. 'Had you not come today, you dear sweet uncle, we would have missed this very pleasant morning visit. Three hoorays for him!'

And when father looked in at the door smiling, he was pulled into the room with much jubilation and cajoling voiced by the three voices in chorus: 'Father dearest, father dear, we are going to see the warship, aren't we?'

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[3] Items of lace

'If the ship is not lying too far out to sea, you little sea rats,' promised father who only partly shared our love for the foaming and white-whipped waves.

'Oh, this uncertainty is hell!' Sélan shot out as soon as the door closed behind father. And Tari could not think of anything worse than that the warship should up anchor and depart before we had been on board.

'This happens only once in a thousand years,' she exaggerated, 'that a warship gets lost and finds its way here. And now there is one here at anchor there is a chance that we may not see it. It would be an eternal pity!'

'Here young ladies, this is for you!' We recognized the voice of our brother and at the same time a letter flew in through the window and landed with a tinkle amongst the photo stands, vases and little scent bottles on the marble console.

'Don't be so rough,' I said sternly. The girls had already dived on the letter and after I nodded in response to Sélan's question 'May I?' she took the letter out of the already opened envelope. Quickly her eyes devoured the contents and with a cry of delight she wrapped her arms around me. 'Sis, sis,' she cried excitedly, 'don't you think it's absolutely heavenly?'

'Adu! Let me go, mad man,' I yelled, tearing her off me. 'You are hurting me.' 'That's nothing! I would like to press you flat with pure joy!'

Laughing I wriggled out of her firm grasp and took from her the paper that had brought her to such a state of ecstasy. There it was, in black and white: tomorrow morning 'would the authorities of J. and their ladies care to visit HMS *Borneo*' and … we three could come too!

I don't know how many times mama had to knock on the door to our adjoining bedrooms to call us to order; even in bed we could not silence our excitement, we had to discuss about 'tomorrow'!

Daylight was already boldly staring through the splits in the shutters surrounding our warm nests in a soft glow when we finally awakened the following morning. Quickly we jumped out of bed, pulled open the door and shutters and ran to the mandi! In the midst of this activity a boy arrived with a message slate that we recognized as coming from the Assistant Resident.

IV

Without thinking we stopped to eye the messenger who had entered the garden where father was walking with our brother. What had happened, I wondered, that Mijnheer Aveling was sending a message to father so early?

'Oh God!' sighed Sélan deeply, 'I suppose this spells the end of our visit to the *Borneo*.'

'Yes, yes, that's what it will be about,' agreed Tari sadly. And before I knew what was happening I was back in our room; my sisters had dragged me back there. They crawled back into their beds and buried their faces under the pillows.

'I am going to stay here the whole day,' said a voice beneath a heap of bantals (pillows) and 'It's mean!' another voice cried tearfully.

Had I myself not been impressed by the terrible suspicion expressed by my sisters I surely would have burst out laughing at the ridiculous scene I was witnessing. In clear daylight, seeing those two worming themselves under the sheets which were barely long enough to cover the two little monkeys.

'But children,' I suddenly heard mother, who had quietly entered the room, say in utter surprise. 'What is this I see? Still in bed? And in a couple of hours the entire company will be leaving for the kapal-perang. Or have you changed your mind and plan to stay home?'

Ma had barely finished speaking when the kapok pillows that covered their heads were thrown off, and immediately thereafter the girls themselves jumped out.

'Lazybones,' mother chastised them. 'Ayo, hurry up, get ready!'

'So we are really still going, Ma?' we asked with one voice.

A look of surprise spread across mama's face and, instead of a reply, we got a counter question: 'Who said that you would not be going?'

'Oh no one, we just thought it, Mummy.'

'So! Well don't dawdle any longer. Pa doesn't like to wait.'

'And girls,' Ma called out after us as we flew outside for the second time, 'don't forget to make sure that you present yourselves well today, understood! It will be quite formal on board. The gentlemen will be wearing semi-formal uniform, Mijnheer Aveling just informed Pa.'

This information was answered by a long 'Oooooohhhh' coming from three throats: is that what had made us so anxious before!

Laughing and singing we marched to the bathroom. I looked back to see Ma shaking her head but laughing saying 'Those children, those children' as she watched her trio disappear.

In no time at all we had completed our toilet and were standing – like perfect specimens 'good enough to put on display', as father averred teasingly – waiting on the front gallery for the clock to strike 8:30 when we were to get into the waiting carriage which would take us to the wharf.

There! Finally the impatiently-awaited sound of the clock tower boomed through the air. Three pairs of hands suddenly turned icy cold and three little hearts beat fast.

'Come on children,' we heard father's voice calling and in a twinkle of an eye we were seated in the covered wagon. The little brown horses flew over the broad, light-grey streets, around the corner, over a bridge and we were there! We got out in front of the harbour office, where a few fellow tour companions were already waiting. Then along came the Assistant Resident's family accompanied by the captain of the warship who had been their guest.

V

We regarded the grey-haired captain with respectful admiration; his face, calm and friendly and sunburnt, exuded such a benevolent air. Full of wonder, we regarded the long uniform coat with its golden epaulettes and sparkling yellow metal buttons which the short figure wore. What a wonderful invention gloves were! They now prevented the Captain from feeling how cold those brown hands were that he now grasped in a really hearty, firm sailor-like handshake when being introduced to us!

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said in a clear and friendly voice when introductions had been completed, 'Shall we go on board?'

Till then we only had eyes and ears for the company but now that we followed the captain down the pier we saw in front of us a slim, white and gold painted sloop, crewed by blond and blue-eyed sailors, one hand holding on to the oars that stuck out well above their heads while with the other they steadied the boat awaiting our arrival.

'Dutch sailors, how nice!' one of the ladies cried out excitedly.

'Yes, Mevrouw,' the Commandant said, 'I promised you yesterday that today you would be rowed to the *Borneo* by some nice boys.' He jumped into the small boat and in a formal manner assisted each of the ladies to get in. The gentlemen were to follow in the harbourmaster's boat but the Captain asked: 'Wouldn't you rather sit with the ladies? There is still enough room for you all.'

'Thank you,' the Assistant Resident replied, 'the boat would become too heavy. Moreover, we have excellent rowers, should you be wondering that we might arrive too late. You will see how well our Javanese will keep up with your boys.'

'You see, Mevrouw,' said the Commandant turning to the women standing next to him, 'I am embarrassed to be alone in the company of so many women.'

'Don't be afraid Captain,' the lady laughed, 'we won't harm you, will we ladies?'

The sailors took their places and at the command: 'Take up oars' from the coxswain who sat behind us, eight oars hit the water simultaneously and, driven

by strong regular strokes, the fine craft shot rapidly over the blue-green surface. In no time we had left the last stretch of the river we had to sail before reaching the sea behind us, and before us, in the distance, out of the infinite, softly rippling and sparkling stretch of water, emerged the squat white object – the sea castle that was the object of our trip.

'Oh, just look' a voice called out, 'how well the Javanese can row.' Everyone looked around and indeed, the brown rowers were certainly no less capable than their white colleagues. Barely five meters behind us we saw the other boat which had left the harbour much later.

'Hallo! Hallo!' people called from both boats waving their hands and handkerchiefs.

Gradually we drew closer to the ship and on the deck we saw a multitude of dark and pale figures. Then finally we were alongside and my eyes were glued to the prow where, in large gold letters the name of the ship sparkled and attached above it, the coat of arms of H.M., finely wrought in copper, gleamed in the bright light of the morning sun.

Our sloop moved serenely around the white ship, then, with a few strong strokes, some commands from the coxswain behind us, a slight bump and we were secured against the *Borneo*. The Captain jumped onto the lowest step of the hanging ladder which would take us on board and offered his hand to help each of the ladies step out of the boat. It was quite a step from the prauw to the step of the ladder, less so for the European ladies with their wide dresses but for those wearing kain it was quite difficult. Worried, we estimated the distance with our eyes and in my ears I could still hear mama's warning: 'Girls, be careful – don't fall into the sea!', about which we had laughed so disrespectfully. But, after some hesitation, we chanced a jump.

Thank God, we all managed to get safely onto the step. The captain quickly preceded us on board where a guard of honour was arrayed, consisting of eight dark-hued Ambonese sailors, four by four, standing immobile like bronze statues facing each other to greet the captain. They were flanked by two officers in military fashion who were introduced to us as the first officer and the oldest second lieutenant of the HMS *Borneo*.

'Ladies, would you be so kind as to move a little to the side?' the Captain asked, 'We have to receive the Assistant Resident.'

When, finally, the entire company was safely on board and the guard of honour dismissed we followed the Captain to the saloon. Mention of the word 'saloon' brought to my mind a large beautifully furnished hall – but, although quite comfortably furnished, how oppressively small the room was in which all of us now found ourselves. The heads of the gentlemen almost

touched the ceiling and we couldn't move an inch without bumping against each other or against some object. And this miniature saloon kept getting fuller and fuller as, at regular intervals from behind a brown velvet covered door, gentlemen appeared wearing two epaulettes to be formally presented to their guests.

'Juffrouw,' I heard someone call behind me all of a sudden. I turned around and peered into the pleasant and genial face of a man who bowed as he approached me.

'How have you been since yesterday?' he asked in a clear voice.

Surprised I looked at him…

'Yes, yes,' he laughed, 'in uniform we do look different than when dressed in civilian clothes.'

Confused and embarrassed, I lowered my eyes and quietly scolded myself. How could I have been so stupid! It was unforgivable of me, even if it had only been for a minute, that I had forgotten what had happened yesterday and had not remembered that we were already acquainted with the two officers from the *Borneo*.

'I beg your pardon Mijnheer Elbers, that I had not thanked you immediately for your friendly concern. This is all so strange for me. It is the first time that I have been on a warship and everything makes an impression on me. I am hearing so many strange names, see so many strange faces … Forgive me.'

'No, no, of course not, absolutely not, not a hair of my head would have blamed you in the slightest. It is only an idea of yours.'

VI

The hearty handshake that sealed this assurance told me that it was well-meant. The saloon began to empty as the majority of the company, no longer able to bear the heat in the crowded room, poured outside as soon as the formal presentation of the officers was over. Only a few stayed behind, amongst whom was the Commandant.

'Oh, what an angel,' cried Mevrouw Aveling, happily approaching a portrait of a child hanging on the wall opposite me, amongst a number of others.

'My youngest child,' said the Captain with a slight tremble in his voice and then, after a moment of painful silence during which we each stared in front of us, realizing, feeling that this had touched a painful nerve in the father. Then, in an emotional voice that emanated from under his grey moustache we heard: 'My youngest child, my only daughter, now almost three years old and … and … I have never seen her!'

We were led to the officers' saloon that was bigger than that of the Captain, less richly but more comfortably furnished. Beautiful engravings and paintings hung on the walls, almost all portraying beautiful women in all kinds of poses, which led one of the gentlemen to remark: 'You can see that this is a room intended for young men.'

'This is our library,' explained the first officer, opening a large mirrored cupboard revealing a treasure trove of piled-up books.

'Come, let's continue,' the captain suggested and the long procession continued, up and down staircases, along numerous gangways and through open spaces, all the while chattering and remarking on things they saw. We passed the cabins of the officers, passed through the quarters of the non-commissioned officers, arrived in the kitchens and finally reached the sleeping quarters of the Dutch sailors. Here we saw several hammocks attached to the ceiling. Because of the throng one of my sisters bumped her head against one. A groan emanated from the hanging bed and Tari jumped aside in fright.

'It's nothing," one of the officers assured her. There's just a couple of sick men lying up there.'

'Poor people, to have to be lying there, sick, in this cramped space.'

'Yes, there is not that much fresh air for them but only those who are a little off-colour are here. Those who are really ill are taken above deck to the hospital. At the moment there are two Inlanders there suffering from a high fever. Poor things, as soon as we land in Surabaya they will be taken to the hospital.'

'And those two, I suppose, have to look after their two sick friends?' I asked, pointing to two very pale boys standing by the hammocks.

'Well no, they are recovering. The doctor does not yet allow them to work and they have to stay here.'

'Oh, what remarkable cushions,' exclaimed Mevrouw Speltie in another corner of the room. We went over to where she was and saw that the entire wall in front of us was covered with shelves filled with green, cylindrical leather bags, all individually numbered.

'Oh, do the ladies want to know what mysterious things those pillows contain?' Elbers asked helpfully and without waiting for an answer he motioned to one of the pale fellows standing by the hammock and requested him to open one of the bags. Ah! Those green bags turned out to be the blue-eyed sailors' cupboard.

We went down another level. 'This is where the Native sailors reside,' our guide informed us. Here no one bumped into anything because there was nothing to bump against other than several rolled up blankets lying on the

floor. On both outside walls there were gun portals in front of which stood small cannons.

'Nice toys, don't you think?' the Lieutenant asked. 'These fire-eaters are here to protect the Natives.'

We left this area via a narrow gangway on one side of which was the pharmacy and on the other – the provisions rooms.

'And this is the shop,' our friendly guide informed us, standing still in front of a small room. 'You can get everything here: drink, cigars, tobacco, eau de cologne, etc etc., too much to mention. Come in, come in ladies and see for yourselves.'

But the ladies had little interest in accepting the invitation; they were not interested in being fried because such a warm stream of air was wafting out of that little room that we had to retreat several paces. Through the open door we could see two stands of bottles, jugs, boxes and a serving bench behind which stood a sailor who acted as a shopkeeper.

'The ladies are no doubt longing to return to the deck?' the Captain asked, seeing that we were using our handkerchiefs as fans and, when we answered in the affirmative, he added smiling, 'Then we will declare the inspection of the *Borneo* complete.'

VII

'Well certainly, gentlemen, absolutely,' a cheerful voice from the sloop replied, 'we will not be saying anything bad about the terrible *Borneo*. I will write a long article about it straight away for the paper. We will send you the edition of the *Java Evening Post*, you'll see.'

When the sloop had travelled some distance from the ship a loud 'hooray' could be heard coming from the ship, which was repeated again and again. On the bridge all the officers were waving their caps and handkerchiefs were flapping like sails in the air. That lively, generous parting greeting was answered equally heartily by the passengers of the small white rowboat that was moving further and further away from the proud sea castle which eventually disappeared behind a bend in the bay. In front of us a small fishing boat containing only one person cut its way through the waves. We saw how the rower used all his efforts to stay ahead of us but the competition was too unequal and in no time the eight sailors had overtaken the cheeky little boat. 'It is a woman!' exclaimed everyone in surprise.

'Now that is an example of emancipation! Mevrouw Aveling laughed merrily. "We have not got that far yet!'

What fun the sailor boys were having but the strong woman saw this quite differently; was not at all pleased that she had been overtaken by the Blandas from whom she was fleeing. We could see the small, stocky back, the face covered with a large caping[4] remain turned away from our gaze and only after our sloop was a long way further did the small hunched blue figure in the small fragile prauw begin to move again and resume rowing.

'You have done your best boys, well rowed!' the captain commended the sailors in a friendly manner when we had solid ground beneath our feet once more. The blond, red faces with sweat trickling down gleamed with pleasure, and the sparkling blue eyes told us that because of the few words of praise from the Captain, the wet clothes caused by the long oars, and the burning sun were forgotten.

We still had to wait for the gentlemen whose sloop had become stuck in the mud in a shallow part. In the meantime we strolled a little further along the road in the shade of the joar trees and met a noisy group of sailors who had been spending the entire morning wandering around the streets and now had to return to their floating home on the green water. 'Oh, a woman wearing a lotus flower!' we suddenly heard an excited voice say, over the murmur of the other voices. And with adoring eyes the non-commissioned officer stared at a figure who quickly passed by us. We burst out laughing … the object of his admiration was a not so beautiful Javanese woman, no longer young with a half dead cepaka flower in a poor konde![5]

The gentlemen had finally come on shore and a little later we rode off in our carriage.

'Adieu sailor! Adieu! Dream of the woman with the lotus flower! Become lost once again in this far-off corner of the world and bring life and merriment to the land, beyond which there is no other!'

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4 A cone-shaped hat worn by farmers.

5 Traditional Javanese woman's hairpiece.

FROM A FORGOTTEN CORNER[1]

Far from the hustle and bustle of the market, the busyness, restlessness and nervous agitation of the large cities, lies the lonely and isolated, quiet and peaceful little town of Jepara.

Once, in the distance past, it was a place of significance; since then, for years it has been in decline to become this forgotten corner where nothing happens and no one comes unless they have to. Nothing reminds one anymore of its earlier greatness and fame – only the old fort on a hill above the kota that can be seen from afar if one approaches from the sea, still reminds one of its glory days. And the old, old gamelan that is played each Monday at midday – and is therefore named Gong Senen or Monday-gamelan. It calls up a memory of medieval days when its joyful sounds – it now frightens strangers by sounds so worn out that they can hardly be called gamelan – called the knights to prepare for a tournament. Almost everyone whose work requires them to stay for a time in this quiet district regards himself an exile and cries in desperation: 'How can I ever get out of here?' And: 'Will I ever get out of here? Won't I already have died of boredom before the hour of my release has arrived?' Oh poor, misjudged place.

Will you allow this Jepara, you who in the past once occupied an honorable place amongst cities of significance? Will you accept that people misjudge and disdain you?

Get up, arise! Let yourself be heard, let your name be sounded with respect and admiration! Because, oh, you are not so bad yet, Jepara, not bad at all! You are so lovely, so charming with your peaceful air; your beautiful, shady lanes that invite one to wander down them, with intimate corners that welcome friends to gather to joke and laugh; your beautiful alun-alun which is always spread in a cloak of green velvet dotted with posies of flowers, blooming in graceful gardens, surrounded by warringen trees behind which the houses shelter, sweetly revealing the brown red of their roofs and the white of their walls through the à jour screen of greenery; your heavenly sea which lets us forget all our earthly cares, rocks us in a fine craft on its foaming waves and surrounds us with its fresh, healthy, energizing breath; your wonderful beach where one can enjoy such beautiful natural spectacles, tableaus of colour and light that the departing sun conjures upon the heavens and on the infinite

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1 'Van een Vergeten Uithoekje,' *Eigen Haard*, 3 January 1903.

stretch of rippling water, whose ripples, now with a little splash, at other times in a reckless rush, break upon the clear white sands.

Alas, your beauty does not appeal to everyone! For those who depend on the company of people your natural beauty is and remains a horror! Oh, do not accept this misjudgment, remember your honourable past! Arise, avenge yourself! Force the majority to express your name with respect and admiration. If the gods are kind to you – you will be able to.

Because you are rich, Jepara, richer than so many other towns that aren't looked down upon; privileged before many cities, which offer opportunities to go out every day, where things are 'so much fun'! You are rich, you are privileged because you possess a treasure which many, very many would be envious of if they only knew, and which Insulinde can be proud of.

It is in your territory that a marvelous artisan family lives and works and first saw the light of day. This priceless possession of yours has been hidden for far too long, buried under the dust of indolence. It must be brought into the light and it shall be!

Undoubtedly the hour is not far away when the attention of the great public here in this land and perhaps also overseas will be directed on to your priceless treasure: the wonderful folk art created in that forgotten, disdained Jepara!

There is hope, a great deal of hope for this!

A movement has been underway over the last few years in Greater Netherlands which will certainly have gladdened the heart of every friend of Java because its aim is to awaken interest, love and respect for the Colonies in the Motherland by spreading popular knowledge about the lands and peoples on the other side of the equator.

It is primarily a knowledge of the work of those agile brown fingers, in which the children of nature from the lands of the sun have invested their soul. It will attract the interest and admiration and in all its aspects find a warm place in the hearts of the artistically-minded Westerner. Blessed are those noble-minded people who brought this movement into life, who gave it shape in the form of the Vereeniging Oost en West which in its short life can already point to many achievements.

It has already established branches in many corners of the Netherlands and of course also in the Indies. The branch of the Mother tree in the Netherlands that has been transplanted in Insulinde's capital is flourishing under the admirable and tireless attention of the excellent workers in whose hands its has been entrusted. In many a heart this young shoot has ignited the strong hope: that it shall deliver rich fruit for the children of the land on whose foundation it grows and thrives.

A few months ago this little tree flowered for the first time, and for its exhausted and loving carers it was a great satisfaction, all agreed: 'It is beautiful.' The exhibition of native craftwork held in Batavia in June 1902 by the Batavia branch of the Vereeniging Oost en West was definitely a success.

'It was a revelation!' People stood perplexed at the achievement of the simple Native! One would never have thought it possible that there was and could be such beauty in the Indies! Hearts trembled with emotion as surprise, pleasure and admiration struggled for dominance when, on the morning of 5 June 1902 the doors were unlocked to let a broad, seemingly endless stream of visitors into the temple of art where supporters of the arts and friends of the Javanese had brought together a treasure trove of wonderful artifacts of this country, the medium of expression for the artistic work of the Native.

The success was unprecedented! The goal had been achieved, the appeal had been won! In the influential circles of the Netherlands Indies interest had been awakened for the work and art of the Native, and some of the contempt that Europeans usually felt for the Native fell away!

There was another advantage that the fine work of Oost en West achieved for the Javanese: financial. At that Exhibition several thousands of guilders worth of mainly copperwork was sold, this being the main focus of the exhibition although others kinds of artifacts were also exhibited, and an equally large sum was spent on further orders. The sum of *f*15,000 has been mentioned. The Surabaya copper workers have been given work for a year. And Oost en West could be pleased by the increase in its membership by several hundred. Oh, and amongst the exhibits which had so overjoyed the art-loving public in Batavia and its surrounds were several articles that had their origins in Jepara.

Woodcarvings from Jepara! In what tone were those words enunciated?

Fear not, you fainthearted, the art of your children is admired and will find more admirers in larger and ever widening circles!

It is said that Oost en West intends before long to arrange an exhibition especially to exhibit Jepara woodcarving. If this report is accurate – we don't know, but in the forthcoming Sinterklaas window display of Oost en West in Batavia, to be mounted in the coming month, it has already been determined that amongst the many items of Native artwork there will be several items of Jepara woodcarving. Those of you who have stood in amazement before the folk art of Jepara, or have become acquainted with it later, will find your admiration and respect increased when you know how this wonderful art is produced.

Come with us to our forgotten corner, to the artist village behind the old Portuguese fort on the hill which, because of its location, is called Blakang-

Goenoeng;[2] come take a look in the workshop of the clever woodcarvers, watch them work, regard their wonderful creations and compare them to the primitive tools with which they work, and alongside your deep admiration and respect for their work, you will feel within you a deep conviction that these simple brown people, who are sitting there so calmly on the ground, humbling themselves before you in a sign of respect, are *born* artists.

Who made them? Who guided them? Who taught these simple children of the fields – who people here call 'adok lontjong, parak tjeleng'[3] – to do this beautiful work, to draw so beautifully? Who? Who?

Just look at their drawings, how pure and perfect of line they are, how harmonious their composition! Nothing disturbs their tone, the graceful, gentle flow of their lines. Whether it be of vines, of leaves, of flowers, birds, dragons, or wayang figures: the lines are always graceful and gentle and together form a harmonious whole.

Who were the masters of these worthy pupils; that they can work and draw in such a wonderfully artistic fashion?

It is an indigenous talent, practised since time immemorial, passed down from father to son. The entire community of Blakang Goenoeng consists of almost nothing else than woodcarvers and cabinetmakers. Young and old, all sons of Blakang Goenoeng know the art of woodcarving and practise it, whether exceptionally well, just ordinarily or imperfectly. And it is certainly notable that it is only in this one village that the beautiful craft of cabinet-making is practised even though in Jepara there are other cabinet-making villages.

The question therefore has often been asked why inhabitants of other villages do not practise woodcarving or want to learn the craft. The oft-repeated reply to this is: 'They are not able to, only the sons of Blakang Goenoeng can do it.' But why is that, one may ask. The naïve belief of the people is that only Blakang Goenoeng has the good fortune of having a woodcarver Danjang[4] as its guardian, and that only its descendants are granted his wonderful gift.

Let us now go to that little village behind the hill where the great family of artists lives and take a peek at their workplace. First step onto the ferry and cross the Jepara river that flows past the foot of the hill towards the sea, then follow the footpath through the fishing village which then brings you to the wide open space by the beach. It is unpleasant walking, isn't it, through an open field without trees while the sun beats down brutally on your shoulders.

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2 'Behind the hill.'

3 'Far from the clock, close to the wild pigs.'

4 A protector spirit.

Please, young lady, don't look so sad, that little bit of sun surely will not give you the colour of a native! And what is that coquettish parasol that you are holding in your hand for? Don't stand and stare, our trip will soon be at an end and what awaits us will make you forget that red spot that the cheeky sun has kissed upon your white neck.

Here is the river boundary of the village already, a prauw awaits you, step in, visitors, on the other side a wonder awaits you, the glory of the now-decayed Jepara!

A guard of honour made up of completely and partly naked children is standing ready on the other side to greet you. Brr, how dirty they are; have they had a mud bath?

But these dirty little things, dear visitors, are the future artists! Look, the ground already provides evidence of their talent. What do you think of these birds and dragons they have drawn on the ground with the aid of a stick and a sharp stone? Or of the wayang story drawn with charcoal on the wooden walls of the guard-house? This is the work of those dirty fingers of those little monkeys who are staring at the strangers open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

Faintly the merry sounds of hammers and the ringing of metal reach your ears: it is the welcome greeting of the woodworkers in their village!

Enter the little bamboo house from where this strange greeting of welcome emanates – be careful, bend your head: the door is quite low. You look at me as though you are thinking: 'You are making fun of me, is this the workshop, this shack? Is this where those beautiful things are made that you have been singing the praises of and wanted to show me? And are those the artists that you so much admire, these half-naked people sitting there on the ground?

Shhh! Don't judge too quickly, look around you, and look carefully. It is true that after the bright sunlight outside it is difficult to adjust to the dim light inside. Get used to it a bit first, look about you, pay attention and then judge.

We knew you would call out in surprise: 'How is it possible?'

Yes, how is it possible – we ask ourselves this also – how is it possible that in this corner, as if it were isolated and exiled from the world at large, there is an environment where one cannot hear a clock, where at night the grunting of wild pigs often startles people awake, in this shed, so poorly lit, such wonderful things can be imagined and produced by these simplest of people who barely have the clothes on their bodies and never, at least most, have ever left the place of their birth?

We are here confronted by one of God's wonderful mysteries!

But let us first look carefully at our surroundings, before we begin to wonder and admire – our pleasure will then be all the greater when we are

amazed by the contrast between the surroundings, the artists and their products.

We find ourselves in a poorly-lit room of at most 16 square meters with 3 entrances by which on both sides there are low, long narrow benches that serve the woodcarvers as workbenches. Most are still young boys, youths, a few men in the prime of their lives and several already quite old. They sit, in pairs at a workbench on the bare earth with their legs crossed or kneeling, clothed only to their knees in short trousers that probably once were white. That was before we entered but now they all sit cross-legged as a sign of respect for the visitors. That is the polite way of sitting for a Javanese.

Each has a collection of chisels beside him of different sizes, ranging from the ordinary-sized one to one smaller than the stem of a pen, long, flat or round iron shafts, with their points sharpened to a flat or half-round edge, each collection numbering about 40. In front of him lies the work of the workman-artist: a thin plank of about 1 cm thickness on which with his chisel and wooden hammer he conjures up the most beautiful figures and drawings.

Oh, just look at how cleverly and agilely he handles his instruments, as quickly he exchanges one chisel with another. Each hammer blow is accompanied by the merry tinkling of the little bells on the bench. He sets down his hammer and chisel and reaches beneath the bench and brings out a black brush with which he brushes away the splinters from the wood he is working on.

He is working on a difficult piece; that piece of very light brown, beautifully grained wood has to be made into a lid for a small workbox. It is ambalo wood from somewhere in the Outer Islands, surprisingly hard to work with, generally used to make the sheaves for krisses but our craftsmen know how to put it to use for their purposes as well. That small plank has to be carved on both sides and then fitted into a frame of dark sono wood. The combination of light-coloured ambalo with the dark sono wood border produces a surprisingly delightful effect as lids for such workboxes.

What sort of wood is that dark one that these fellows are working on? It is called sono wood that is grown here. Beautiful isn't it, that dark wood with those flames of colour embedded in it? Even untouched it looks good, what then after these clever artists decorate it with their art? But don't ask whether this is pleasant work – those worn chisels that have to be constantly sharpened on the stone make clear how tough the material is with which the artist must work.

Why is there paper stuck to the plank? My dear inquisitor, don't you see the charcoal drawings on it? This the pattern for the carving. You see, the

artists have created a new pattern on paper which is then stuck onto the plank, and then they cut out what is not required according to the drawing so that the figures stand out very clearly. After this each line is then carefully followed, the flowers, the leaves are chiseled out and smoothed out, the vines that have to flow across the front are accentuated, and will be finished off when the entire pattern has been completed. But before all this happens they place the piece of paper, of which copies are made, on the plank that is to be carved, and wipe this over with a small bag filled with a mixture of soot and oil. In a blink of an eye the drawing on the paper is transferred to the wood. Very simple but very cleverly worked out, don't you think? In this way the intricate patterns are transferred, as it were, with the single brush of the bag of soot.

Be careful of your dress, lady, Singo's home does not have a marble floor, you are kneeling on Mother Nature's earth! But you don't hear me: are you so entranced in watching the work of that brown fellow about whom, only moments ago, you were pulling up your beautiful nose?

You are right though, it is worth giving your full attention to what is happening there in front of your eyes: the creation of a beautiful wayang figure emerging from the chisel and hammer being driven by the agile, quick and confident hand of the native artist.

Oh, what is that activity all of a sudden? What is happening, friends? What are you pressing forwards to see? Ah! You have discovered the treasures. You don't know where to look, there is so much to see!

Shall we help you – to take a selection out of this treasure trove of wonderful things and then bring them out into the sunlight to look at? It is alright, don't worry. We hope we have made a good selection in choosing to bring this beautiful fire screen that would not look out of place in the most artistic salon, from its dark corner into the light.

We will begin with you to bring our respectful salute of honour to the humble artist who has created this piece of art. He is all the greater as artist because single-handedly, without any assistance or guidance, he has been able to bring this wonderful art to such an extraordinary level, with the barest of equipment to have produced something as beautiful as this! Your place is not there in the dust at our feet, it should be up there, much higher than us who you address as 'bendoro' (master, mistress), but who in reality, in all your simplicity, are so much more superior because of your heavenly artistic talent.

What you have given us to see here is a feast for the eyes, a pleasure for the heart, you modest, exceptional artist, the beautiful dream of your soft soul

chiseled into the magnificent lines, enchanting creations, and tender hollows. The drawings are pure art and their working-out immaculate. Just follow those lines as they curve graciously, the soft indentations of the leaves, the quiet meanderings of those dreamy lines flowing without the least obstruction, ending here in an artistic curl, there in a gracious wave, like the tender wave of a charming woman.

The whole gives the impression of representing the dignified grace offered by the flower, the demi-god of the Native people: its aristocracy. Don't you feel a sense of what must have come over the artist when he saw the beautiful dream of his soul given real form when it was chiseled out in the wood now, as both your eyes and your soul absorb the beauty of his creation?

Wonderful art! Light-coloured jati wood carved out in à jour style representing two fine wayang figures in half relief at whose feet snakes are writhing in a rich natural environment of flowers and vine leaves amongst which little birds are celebrating. The whole is framed in dark-coloured sono wood onto which the carving extends with the snakes climbing up with open mouths, showing their split tongues as though ready to bite any hand which tries to touch the beautiful work that crowns this screen which stands on two neatly carved legs of sono wood.

A beautiful shine covers the carving as if it were polished. And oh, how simply this was achieved. That beautiful shine was achieved simply by brushing it with a stiff brush made of inju from the asen palm.

Oh man, oh man, where have you got that beauty from, asks an enraptured spectator, full of emotion? The simple man, who remains sitting humbly on the ground, momentarily lifts his eyes which had been respectfully lowered and says simply: 'From my heart, bendoro!'

* * * *

No, no that little jewel is not for sale, it already has an owner. Mijnheer Abendanon, Director of O. E and D. in Batavia is the owner of this beautiful fire screen.

Well, then another, smaller object from this large collection: fine picture frames, photograph stands, beautiful photograph, hombre, cigar, jewelry, work and glove boxes. Charming, aren't they, ladies, those boxes made of two types of wood, dark sono wood base with a light ambalo wood lid framed in sono wood. The carving with which it is decorated is really beautiful. His workbox has two wayangs on the top surrounded by leaves and flowers and inside two birds surrounded by vine leaves. On the front – decorative vine leaves and flowers with two snakes that are slithering towards each other and on both

sides the same with bush fowls replacing the snakes, and on the back the same but this time with deer.

The colour of the small boxes is also very fine, light jati wood, such as that photo box in the shape of a book. On its lid, gracious vine leaves and two fine wayang figures, on the spine, vine leaves with two dragons.

That box with eight sides is so pretty. It is made of two types of wood and stands on the sweetest set of legs. It belongs on the dressing table and can be used for storing face powder and a brush. Don't you think those small, longish boxes with their see-through lids are sweet? They are for the tea table, to put teaspoons in.

Gorgeous isn't it, that tray made of light jati wood with the carved figures and edged in sono wood? And what do you think of those objects for the writing table: the blotting paper holder, the box for stamps, and paper knife? No doubt you want to take them with you? I regret to have to disappoint you ladies, none of the objects on display here are for sale because … they are already sold!

Oh, we sincerely regret that the artists you have so honoured with your visit are unable to sell you a souvenir of that nice visit to their atelier. The reason for this is quite sad. They don't have any working capital and therefore cannot make any surplus objects because in the time between carving and waiting for a sale they still have to live, don't they? They are ordinary people like us – they haven't yet learned to live off air.

But this state of affairs will soon end. Better days are coming for our artists, they are heading for a beautiful future. Oost en West has taken pity on them and as a first step, has put them in the position to be able to work for a few months. All those fine objects have been ordered and paid for by the Vereeniging for the forthcoming Sinterklaas display in Batavia.

This only the beginning…

We respectfully offer you our grateful homage, Vereeniging Oost en West, for your noble work, your diligence, your dedication and your energy. May you see, as a reward for your tireless and beautiful efforts for the benefit of these lands, the time approaching that the entire civilized world pays attention to the artistic products of the beautiful state of Insulinde!

Jepara, little Jepara, a pessimist has prophesied that in a quarter century you will be nothing more than a pigsty. Do you still fear that this dreadful prophecy will come true? We have the wonderful conviction that you will absolutely give the lie to this. The fame that comes with the beauty of your art has even reached as far as the palace of the Under-King where an extremely fine screen made of sono wood decorates the salon of the Governor General's

wife. And at the moment a second screen is being made for His Excellency at the woodcarvers' workshop.

Heavenly, small, unspoiled corner of the earth which brings forth such divine works of art such as the wall in the kabupaten of Jepara which we don't even dare to begin to describe, only too aware of the fact we are unqualified to describe its beauty so we suffice here by including only a photograph of it.

You are not doomed to destruction; rather you are destined, just as in the past, to be the bearer of a well-known and highly honoured name.

DISILLUSIONMENT[1]

The little bird stared longingly at the opening of its nest through which its parents had flown out. Oh, if only I could do what they do, its small glistening eyes, glued to the opening, seemed to say.

The nest was warm and soft and the little bird was well looked after but ever since it had poked its little head out of the nest and had seen that there was another world beyond that in which till then it had spent its short life, everything seemed to be too small. With an irresistible longing in its heart, it dreamed of the outside; of the great endless universe which, when it had first seen it, had made it dizzy and about which it now daydreamed.

Every day after that the little bird poked its head out of the nest: it saw, it enjoyed and it yearned. How beautiful it was, so beautiful out there in the infinite universe which its parents called 'the world'. It was so bright there and so colourful! So different to its own grey, stuffy, dark and cramped little home.

Its nest was attached to a tree that was flowering. The little bird enjoyed the sweet-smelling blossoms that contrasted so beautifully against the green and around which little birds, smaller than this bird, fluttered to give intimate kisses to the flowers and then zoom away.

The loveliest, most beautiful thing of all, the little bird thought, were the golden shafts of light that pricked through the foliage, and the blue that shimmered through the green frame and, as night began to fall, took on other colours, sometimes so wonderful that it had to close its eyes. 'Oh, that's where I have to go, to the golden light, to that rich blaze of colour!' That's where the little bird wanted to go, if only it could flap its wings.

Its parents listened in full of sympathy when the little bird revealed to them its deepest desires.

'There are no worms up there,' its father said matter-of-factly. 'There is no one up there, nothing.'

'Nothing, father, nothing?' the little bird exploded. 'Is that blaze of colour nothing then? That golden light, nothing? Oh father!'

'Nothing!' the father bird said harshly. 'You cannot live off that. Up there, there are no worms, but there are birds of prey!' The little bird was silent. It felt cold, there was a chill around its heart.

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[1] This appeared in *Weekblad voor Indië*, 2 Oct 1904, pp. 310–12. The author is noted in a footnote as follows: 'This essay is by Raden Ajeng Kartini, wife of the Regent of Rembang, who died recently.' See also Kartini's letter to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri, 10 July 1902.

Later, when it once again expressed its yearning for the world, for the light, for life, the wind that was rustling through the leaves heard it and said seriously to the smaller bird: 'Little bird, listen to the words of your old father who has seen and experienced a lot in life. Put those thoughts, your longing for the light, for that beautiful, happy life, out of your head. Be sensible, be like the other birds, yearn for worms and look for them on the ground. They don't exist up there, there is nothing up there. All it provides is an opportunity for you to see far away, to enable you to survey everything, that's all!'

'Isn't to see far away, to be able to view over everything, not wonderful then? To see the light, the earth, the beautiful, beautiful world?'

'Child, child, do not yearn for the world, it is so cold and hard there. Enjoy your simple life, your beautiful youth, which will end soon enough, and then, and then…'

And the wind told of many things that it had seen on its long travels, the terrible and the ugly things that had happened in the beautiful world. It told of struggles, of difficulties, of suffering and death.

Fear gripped the little bird's heart, it trembled … But the sun sent down its bundles of golden light that bored through the foliage around the little bird's nest and garlanded the flowers and leaves in a golden hue. The little bird forgot its anxieties and doubts and was overjoyed to see the golden light. No, it can't be true what those sombre old folks said. The world was beautiful and life was light and cheerful. And if it could just flap its wings it would have taken off to the great sparkling light that so encouraged and warmed it.

At last the little bird could fly. It could go out into the world, into life. How its heart swelled with happiness when, coming fully into the light, it was able to see all of both heaven and earth! It flew towards the light in exultation. Up it went, high up into the blue sky, the giant dome with its enormous, shining, all-comforting and all-warming light!

Ahead it saw another little bird. It was overjoyed; was it a little brother that was also going to the golden light? It would catch up to it and they would continue on together. But in the blue sky a black speck appeared, which gradually became bigger and bigger.

'Flee, little brother, flee!' the other traveller called. 'Flee, it is a bird of prey that is coming to get us!'

Hardly had he said this when the little bird heard a terrible cry and the dark shape shot past it and its companion was gone. Astonished, the little bird stared after the giant bird which now held its friend in its sharp claws. Trembling in fear and shock, it shot downwards and landed on the first tree it came across. It had not yet recovered from its shock when it saw another

black speck in the blue sky. Another bird of prey? Its little heart shrunk and it anxiously hid itself under the leaves. It could not fly home because it was so tired and hungry. The black speck became bigger and bigger and gradually covered the entire sun and the great, beautiful, sparkling light.

The little bird went cold with fear. A sharp light flashed in front of its eyes and at the same time it heard a loud bang accompanied by a tremendous crack. The little bird closed its eyes and became unconscious.

When it awoke it found itself lying on the ground. Oh how cold it was, and its whole body hurt. The tree in which it had sheltered had been felled by lightning and the exhausted little bird had been thrown to the ground. Its little body was soaking wet. There was water everywhere, on the ground and falling from the sky all around and on it.

With great difficulty it raised itself, moved its wings but these remained loosely by its side. With a cry of sadness it slumped to the ground again. Its wings had been broken. Its eyes had lost their brightness, all life had drained from them.

Was this the life, the great, beautiful life of its dreams? Where was the sun, the golden sun, that all-comforting, all-warming light it had worshipped? Where was the beautiful blue heaven whose blaze of colour had given it such pleasure? Now the heavens were drab, as drab as its nest had been. But at least there it had been dry and soft, safe and warm, and here it was so cold, so hard, so wet. Oh, if only it was back again in that stuffy little nest, safely under mother's protective wings. How good it had been there!

The little bird shivered. It was so cold, it felt such pain and was so hungry. Then close by, it saw a fat worm; the little bird saw it and cried! Was this then the life, that beautiful bright, happy life that it had so desperately longed for? A sob welled up in the little bird's breast. The little body trembled, it stretched out, another sob. The dull eyes, from which all life had ebbed, closed and the little bird was no more.

TO OUR FRIENDS

A Poem[1]

Why is it that people
Once strangers to each other, after a brief glance
In each other's eyes, wish
Never to be parted from each other again?

What is it that moves the heart
At the sound of a voice
It had never heard before and which
Echoes long after in our ears like a requiem?

What is it that causes the soul
To exult in jubilation
And excitedly enwraps the heart
When a certain pair of eyes
Peers lovingly into our own
Or offers us a warm hand?

Do you know, blue sea
Which rolls in waves from coast to coast?
Are you able to tell me on what
That wonder is based?

Will you tell me, swift wind
You, who have come from so far away
What is it then that, uncalled for,
Binds the heart together forever with a strong bond?

[1] The poem was included in Allard (1976), 388–389.

Oh! Tell me sparkling golden sun
Heaven's mighty source of light and warmth,
What is the name of that wonder
That makes the heart so perfect,
That softens and makes us forget our suffering
That burdens us here on earth?

A sunbeam breaks through the foliage
And falls onto a flood of waves
It was already becoming light, the surroundings become brilliantly lit
By the gold flood of sunlight!

An apotheosis of light and colour
Meets the enchanted eye
And from within an emotional breast
A warm prayer of thanks arises!

It is not one wonder but three!
Sparkling on the fluid surface of a pearl
Writes the Light in brilliant letters:
'Love, Friendship and Empathy!'

Love, Friendship and Empathy
The little waves murmur in repetition
And the wind sings in the trees
To the querulous human child.

Sweetly the listening ear
Is caressed by the wondrous song of the waves and the wind
'Throughout the entire world
Kindred souls will find each other!'

They care not about colour
Nor rank nor social position
But reach out to all
To take each other's hand!

And once they have found each other
Then they will never let go the ties
That bind them. And they remain through everything
True to each other, regardless of time and distance.

One in happiness, and in sadness one,
And this way throughout life!
Oh, blessed they who meet a kindred soul
Such a one has found a heavenly gift!
Djiwa

Part Four:
Ethnographic Writing

1979
R.A.KARTINI
1879-1979
PERINGATAN
100 tahun
R.A.KARTINI
REPUBLIK INDONESIA 100,-
REPUBLIK INDONESIA 100

INTRODUCTION TO THE ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING

Much of Kartini's writing was ethnographic in nature. Kartini used her writing, her published prose work as well as her correspondence, to convey to her readers 'real' descriptions, as well as an appreciation, of Javanese life, society and culture. Ethnography was of increasing importance in the second half of the nineteenth century in discovering and recording the societies that were revealed as European imperial claims were gradually filled in by exploration, subjugation and exploitation. World Exhibitions, the showcases of imperialism, became important as venues for the popularization of this new knowledge, while its scientific processing at universities provided the 'rules' by which the collections of artefacts, photographs and information could assembled and understood.

Bloembergen (2006) has suggested that the ubiquity of an 'ethnographic approach' in much of the writing about the East lay not only in its influence on and reflection of a growing popular curiosity in Europe about 'primitive societies'. In the latter half of the nineteenth century knowledge of 'the other' provided a mirror against which both critics and admirers of Western civilization could examine their own culture (103–4). Ethnography also provided the intellectual tools for appropriating the imperial domain into the fabric of a national psyche. For the Dutch, the ordered exhibitions of ethnographic objects, provided

> a testing ground for the shaping of the Netherlands into a modern, powerful nation … [and] reflect[ed] the objective of gaining better economic and administrative control of the colony, to be able to understand and control it as a single comprehensive entity, as a working area of modern Dutch civilisation and entrepreneurship (Bloembergen 2006: 64).

As suggested in the general introduction, Kartini's examination of her own Javanese culture, while clearly influenced by this European 'ethnographic approach' prominent in contemporary Dutch publications, had a similar but counter aim. Her evident adoption of this approach, both in specific writings and in the course of her correspondence, in a real sense also became a 'working area' from which the idea of a modern nation could be fashioned. Both informally through her correspondence and in the two pieces published here, which more formally meet the criteria of being ethnographic, Kartini was intent on intervening in the contemporary European ethnographic discourse.

In doing so she moves beyond the role, already increasingly common, of being a mere informant for European collectors: her information is emphatically presented as statements about 'my people' and 'my country'.

The writing in these two articles demonstrates Kartini's ability to step outside of her own cultural traditions to examine both courtly and 'ordinary' Javanese society and the various 'foreign oriental' communities of Java's cities. It could be added that Kartini's description and analysis of European colonial society in her correspondence also reflect, and possibly contributed to, the development of her ability to analyze her own society. The two articles here bracketed together as representing a specific style of Kartini's writing also reveal the particular cultural position that Kartini inhabited within Javanese society. As well as being located in the rarefied world of the Javanese *priyayi,* the traditional rulers of Java engaged by the colonial government to undertake the primary disciplining of the Javanese population, Kartini embodied the particular cultural traditions of the geo-cultural region of Java's north coast, known as the Pasisir. In terms of class, language and culture she was isolated from both the mass of the Javanese and from the realm of the traditional Javanese royal courts of the interior of the island. While the interior was the home of Javanese 'high culture' as it had been defined by Dutch experts, the Pasisir represented the more heterogeneous culture of a periphery long influenced by the presence of foreigners. This is underlined not only by what the correspondence reveals as the 'modernity' of the Condronegoro family itself but by Kartini's evident interest in the Chinese, Arab and Indian communities that had become absorbed in this coastal region.

The first of the two articles, 'Het Blauverfen', concerning the process of producing the dark blue colouring of the traditional batik cloth, was an exploration into the traditional world of central Java. Here Kartini distinguishes between the work of the established producers of batik and that of the village producers. Since, as noted in the general introduction, Kartini herself was attracted to the newer batik forms produced in the Pasisir, this exploration already has the tone of an outsider's keen observation – hence its ethnographic character – and her practice of it suggests the practising of an art form already relegated to the status of heritage. Kartini's original account of the dyeing process accompanied the sisters' contribution to the National Exhibition of Women's in 1898. Only later was it brought to the attention of the Dutch expert on batik, GP Rouffaer, who eventually included it in what became the standard work on batik, Rouffaer and Juynboll, *De Batik-Kunst in Nederlandsch-Indië en haar Geschiedenis op Grond van Materiaal aanwezig in 's Rijks Etnographisch Museum en Andere Openbare en Particuliere Verzamelingen in*

Nederland, published in 1914. As the extended title admits, this volume was not the result of the authors' field-based ethnographic exploration but an analysis of samples from Dutch museums and collections, while the discussion was largely based on ad hoc information they had received from the colony (Boembergen 2006: 253–254). Rouffaer was already well known for his interest in Javanese arts as he had earlier published an account of the batik process in a long article, 'De Batik-Kunst van Nederlandsch-Indië', in the Bulletin of the Haarlem-based Colonial Museum where Juynboll was the director.[1] In 1914 he was able to rectify and expand some of the detail of this earlier work by drawing on later – but in particular 'authentic' – sources of information, one of which was the writing by Kartini. In introducing the incorporation of Kartini's description of the dyeing process as 'the Jepara manuscript', Rouffaer and Juynboll wrote of its significance of a newer approach to studying other cultures:

> Some assistance [in the preparation of this work] was received from quarters the value of which it would be difficult to adequately and sufficiently give recognition to. Where batikking is primarily the activity of Javanese women, there could hardly be anything more relevant and significant than a Javanese women who herself practises the art of batikking providing her own explanation of the techniques it involves. This extraordinary privilege was one that we were able to benefit from. During the above-mentioned Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid of '98, three daughters of the Regent of Jepara – whose Javanese aristocratic and official title is Raden Mas Adipati Aria Sasraningrat – contributed, apart from several examples of work they had produced themselves, a set of batik equipment accompanied by a range of examples of the cloth at various stages of its treatment. And, most precious of all, subsequently, an explanation and description of the entire process written in excellent Dutch that they had written themselves. With this account generated from their own facility in making batik, Raden Ajeng Kartini, Raden Ajeng Roekmini and Raden Ajeng Kardinah – the names of the daughters of the regent – contributed in the most fortuitous way to the information already provided primarily by younger colonial officials in Java with an interest in the question. However useful the attempts by these interested males had been in providing an insight into the matter, too often their accounts lacked the detail that only direct personal experience and practice can provide. And where here again it was males who were attempting to describe the nature of what is essentially a skill performed by Javanese women, every effort will be made here to take advantage of the

[1] Rouffaer later published a larger five-volume work on the same topic.

> information, so full of small insights about the finer details of the work, that have been so freely made available by these Javanese ladies.
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> The previously mentioned president of the East-Indies section [of the Exhibition], Mevr. Licardie, née Daum, was therefore so kind as to provide me with a copy of the Jepara manuscript. And we also thank Raden Mas Panji Sasra Karatana [sic][2], currently resident in this country to pursue his studies, for his wholehearted permission for this to be published. It constitutes an important element in our first chapter while we are also privileged in receiving a family photograph, reproduced on plate 18, of the Regent of Jepara. It shows the Regent himself and his wife seated and standing behind him their four unmarried daughters. In the middle behind the low table we see Raden Ajeng Kartini with R. A. Roekmini on her right and R.A. Kardindah on her left, the three writers of the document. A fourth adult daughter, R.A. Kartinah stands to the right of her father Regent.
>
> Their brother [Sosrokartono] who happily supplied us with this photograph is also worthy of our gratitude for other reasons. It was never too much trouble for him to provide us with information or to obtain information from others for the benefit of our study (Rouffaer and Juynboll, 1914, x–xi).

The authors' generous note of appreciation in a more formal sense echoed what many of her European correspondents may – or at least should – have also felt: that 'there could hardly be anything more relevant and significant than a Javanese … herself providing her own explanation of … [her society and culture]'. This was indeed 'an extraordinary privilege' but it did not follow that the owners of that culture should be free to rule themselves.

The second article also appeared in a prestigious publication: *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, the Netherlands' leading scientific journal, in 1899. Presumably submitted in 1898, but written, Kartini claims, when she was still a girl, the article gives evidence of Kartini's keen eye for detail and interest in the rich and diverse heritage of the Pasisir region. The specific focus here can be related to other extended references in her letters to the Chinese, Arab and Indian communities who had become integral to the vitality of the north coast cities, including Semarang. The historical Koja district in Semarang, located adjacent to the Chinese district,

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[2] Presumably it is Kartini's brother that is being referred to. Reproducing the Javanese form the name should have been Sasra Kartana. The alternative spelling used in this volume throughout transposes the letter 'a' with 'o'.

is still referred to today as the 'pekojan'. Kartini translates Koja for her readers as 'Moor' and, although various Indonesian dictionaries interpret the term differently, today, in Semarang the term 'Koja' is unequivocally understood as referring to Indian traders who inhabited this specific district in the city.[3] These were often long-time residents in port cities like Semarang and, like the 'peranakan' Chinese, they often intermarried with local Javanese women. While the context of the event that Kartini had evidently witnessed is not made clear, her account suggests an obvious familiarity. Occasional references in correspondence to India, including a reference to the Indian feminist, Pandita Ramabai, suggests an emerging interest in this Asian nation whose culture had contributed so much to hers.

As in the case of the first article on the preparation of batik, the writing here reflects the concern of modern ethnography with 'authenticity': it was a cultural event that she herself had witnessed. She also considered the reader being educated about this foreign society, ensuring that all words specific to the culture being described and thus likely to be unfamiliar – at least those assumed to be unfamiliar to the average colonial – were provided with a translation. Commenting on the article and its contents several years later, Kartini wrote:

> We attended the wedding; many of the traditional practices have now been lost so that my description of such a marriage is now no longer accurate. But then, that is now so old. I wrote it as a child and several years ago it appeared in the *Tijdschrift voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde van N.I.* I am not sure whether I should be pleased that some of the traditional customs have been lost when I see what they have been replaced with. That imitation European! – and if only it were done <u>well</u> – stuck onto the fabric of tradition gives a most ludicrous impression. It is quite understandable that it calls out the mirth of Europeans. The important Koja now considers it beneath his dignity on his wedding day at the formal meeting to give his young wife the traditional sirih in its decorative golden case. The bridegroom who we recently saw, gave his bride a posy of garish artificial flowers from which gaudy ribbons were trailing. It was not kenanga, cepaka or melati that decorated their bridal attire, but garish artificial flowers. After all, they were European, weren't they? (Letter to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri, 12 December 1902)

[3] The standard, *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia* interprets the term as 'orang Mur atau orang India', either Moorish or Indian people. The *Advanced Indonesia-English Dictionary* translates the term as 'merchants from India'.

Kartini was evidently reminded of her article in 1902 when she replicated the form of this account in describing traditional Javanese wedding of her sister, included in part two of this volume amongst her longer pieces of descriptive writing. While this was not completely transformed into a generalizable account of aristocratic Javanese wedding ritual, the lengthy and finely detailed description provided for Hilda clearly could well have constituted a draft for a similar ethnographic article.

Acceptance of an article for publication in a learned journal was (as today) a notable achievement. Although by the late nineteenth century accounts of specific ethnographic, geographic or economic aspects of the east Indies colony would have typically drawn on the contributions of countless anonymous 'native informants', contributions by named indigenous writers, although no longer unique (as Rouffaer indicated in the quotation above), remained unusual – even more so where the author was a woman. The table of contents of the 1899 edition of *Bijdragen*, as well as a footnote to the article itself, however, does not name Kartini but states that it was 'Submitted by Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosro Ningrat, Regent of Japara', that is to say, Kartini's father. The protocols of this serious scientific journal still limited possibilities for women to publish under their own name; in Kartini's case, this was compounded by Javanese etiquette prohibiting unmarried women from appearing in public. This being so, Kartini's successful intervention in Dutch scientific discourse as a woman, a Javanese and a colonial subject, is therefore, all the more remarkable.

In terms of Kartini's development as a writer, the importance of the article lies in the fact that it was Kartini's first published writing and perhaps the first article published, if anonymously, by a Javanese woman in a Dutch scientific journal. The article would have attracted attention for several reasons. Firstly, because it was an article that had been contributed by an *Inlander* – a sufficiently novel event, whether or not it was known that the author was a woman. Secondly, the article dealt with a community beginning to attract some attention as a result of the work of Snouck Hurgronje, the Islam specialist and Adviser on Native Affairs who may well have approved it for publication. More generally, as it relates to the population category, Vreemde Oosterlingen, the official colonial identification of all non-European non-Native inhabitants, it also reflected a growing interest in – and concern about – the place of the 'foreign oriental' communities in the colony in the light of emerging voices of concern about native welfare. It was often these communities – rather than the implications of colonial economic policies – that were being blamed for the economic condition of the Javanese.

'THE JEPARA MANUSCRIPT (1898)' DYEING BATIK BLUE

There are specific businesses that undertake the process of blue dyeing, the essential first stage in the preparation of batik intended as *kain sogan*. The process is undertaken almost exclusively by women. Everywhere where batikking is popular one comes across 'blue painters' (*wong medel*[1]). The process of dyeing blue[2] requires a great deal of water each day and for this reason the women engaged in this process usually have houses located on or near by a river. In Solo and Jogya, which in all matters concerning batik are superior to all other places, it takes only a few hours to transform the white base of the batik material into a beautiful dark blue without damaging the batik work in any way. In places outside these two centres however, one can be lucky to have one's batik returned after ten days without the batik work being totally ruined.

The main difference lies in the fact that in Solo, the origin of batik, the vats for the dying process are better made and here also the preparation of the indigo water (a secret maintained by the Solo and Jogya women who undertake the dyeing process) is different than elsewhere. There the vats that are used are large enough for the batik to be fully stretched out, whereas here in Jepara people make do with half oval-shaped earthen pots [the so-called *jembangan* – see our photo no. 34 – Rouffaer] with a diameter of no more than 1 meter and about the same depth so that the batik can only placed in it folded up several times. Because of this breaks necessarily occur in the batik work which is aggravated during the rough treatment it receives when being washed.

A small blue colouring workshop usually consists of three or four dyeing vats (*jembangan*); a large workshop may consist of up to 24. The *jembangan* are located inside, half buried in the ground to ensure they do not topple over. They are filled to within two handspans from the top with a solution of indigo[3], some quicklime[4] and water. Each day this solution has to be stirred a good half hour with a stick. From time to time more indigo and water is added

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1 Words in parentheses are original to Kartini's text. Rouffaer's editorial insertions are indicated by square brackets.

2 Throughout the text the process of blue dyeing is described as 'blauw verfen' and the person as 'blauw verfsters'. The text provides no Javanese or Malay term for blue or blue 'painting'. The literal English translation – painting – has been translated as 'dyeing'.

3 Rouffaer corrects this in a footnote: 'This is inaccurate: it should be "a solution of water combined with finely separated indigo"'

4 Rouffaer corrects this in a footnote: 'It should read "slaked lime"'.

and every three days a ripe banana (*pisang batu*), pineapple peels or sugarcane is added. If this is omitted the liquid in the *jembangan* turns a shade of green, an indication of its deterioration. Should that occur it is said of the *jembangan* that it is 'ill'! One solution for curing this condition then is to throw in several aren sugar biscuits. No items may then be immersed in the *jembangan* before it has been 'restored to health'. To do so would not only harm the *jembangan* but also the batik would not be properly dyed blue.

Each afternoon all the coloured pieces of batik are taken out of the *jembangan* and taken to the river to be washed. The cloths are allowed to float but held down with the left hand and forcefully beaten with a piece of wood held in the right hand. After that it is hung out to dry after which it is once again placed in the *jembangan* with a lid placed on top. This process is repeated until the material attains a good dark blue colour.

If the workers are particularly skilful in their craft and if the indigo they use is of good quality then the process of dyeing the material blue does not take long, no more than 10 days. Otherwise, and this is often the case, one has to wait to get one's batik returned from the blue dyers for a good month, and then it is usually unevenly coloured and a pale blue.

For efficient dyers however, this business is quite profitable since the costs are minimal and the dyeing process is well paid. Not only batik but all kinds of other items are dyed blue such as *baatjes*, thread etc. etc.

MARRIAGE AMONGST THE KOJA PEOPLE[1]

Amongst the Foreign Orientals[2] who constitute a small proportion of the population of Java, are the Kojas (Moors).[3] They are the next largest group of Eastern foreigners after the Chinese who have for centuries settled here in our hospitable country.

There are settlements of Kojas in all cities, large and small, which are referred to here by the term 'pekojan'. In small towns they represent only a small number of people, and it is only in the larger cities that they have their own appointed community leaders, who the Government has given the title of 'Captain of the Moors'.

Like almost all Asiatics here, the Kojas devote themselves mainly to trade. Were one to wander through a pekojan one would find their trade goods on display, if not in all, than certainly in the majority of their homes. Most of these houses do not have a front yard, opening directly on to the street, and are enclosed on both sides by high walls. This and also the fact that, where no shop has been established, the front door is always kept shut, unlike the custom in the Indies which is to keep houses open, is due to the fact that female members of the family may not be subjected to the gaze of strangers.

While even young Moorish women are rarely to be seen emerging from their shelters, young girls will never be found outside. In stating this, we are not referring to the few well-off Moorish families in the larger cities whose homes have been thoroughly saturated by the all overwhelming influence of Western civilization. In such homes, families have broken with the old traditions that command young girls not to reveal themselves to the eye of a stranger. In those homes daughters will receive instruction from European lady teachers in everything that a cultivated European girl must know; will dress themselves

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1 'Het Huwelijk bij de Kodjas', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, Vol 6, Pt 1, 1899, pp. 695–702. A footnote to the article's title states: 'Submitted by Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosro Ningrat, Regent of Japara'. Kartini acknowledges her authorship in a letter of 12 December 1902. All words in parentheses are as in the original. Indonesian words have been converted to modern spelling.

2 Kartini employs the term 'Vreemde Oosterlingen' the official colonial identification of all non-European and non-Native inhabitants.

3 Kartini provides the translation Moor (Moeren) and uses this throughout. Modern dictionaries variously define Koja as Arab or Indian but consistently as Muslim trader. In local usage today Koja refers to Indian merchants.

in gowns; and, accompanied by their mothers, will take a carriage to go on shopping expeditions; will attend festivities and other public entertainments; One may even see the occasional young Moorish lady galloping past on a powerful steed.

This essay, however, is not devoted to these progressive individuals: it will deal with Kojas in general and in particular, the practice of marriage amongst this ethnic group. As is generally known, amongst Eastern peoples marriage is more a matter that concerns the families of the couple than the individuals themselves, and more particularly the girl who is being pushed into the shaky boat of marriage. Where sometimes the young man is informed when a family has marriage plans in mind, or where, as occasionally occurs, he himself is the one who informs his parents of his interest in engaging a life partner – the girl is entirely ignored in this business. Parents do what they like in arranging the marriage of their daughters who they give away to anyone they want to without even exchanging a single word with her about it.

Marriages amongst the Kojas generally only come about as a result of an exchange of information between families. Children of both sexes are kept strictly separated from each other. Most Moorish girls meet no member of the stronger sex of their race other than their fathers, brothers, uncles and male servants. They are kept carefully hidden from the view of those who may one day become either her partner or parents-in-law.

If one enters the home of a Koja it is rare for one to meet a girl; as soon as a stranger sticks his nose in the door they scatter in fright and hide themselves, and don't reappear until they are assured that the visitor, male or female, will be sitting at least a mile away from her.

When a young Moorish man grows tired of his carefree unmarried life he turns to his parents or, if they should no longer be alive, to other close family members who take up the task of finding a woman for the young man. If a girl is found who on the basis of information gained is considered suitable, the parents of the young man will approach the family of the girl. On this visit they bring bananas, pinang nuts and sirih, gifts that are given to the parents whose child they want to have as a daughter-in-law.

In accepting these gifts, the recipients acknowledge that they are prepared to enter into discussions about the marriage that the givers have in mind. It is then the turn of the parents of the girl to undertake an investigation into the character of the marriage candidate. Should the outcome of these investigations prove agreeable the families will then continue their discussions about the marriage. When both parties are in agreement on everything, the family of the young man will give to the family of the girl a gift for her,

consisting of items of clothing, which is called a 'pertondo'. Well-off families will give complete outfits, 'pakian' (clothes) while the less well-off usually limit their gift to a single tem, usually consisting a 'selendang'.

The young people are now engaged and the marriage day is now determined. About three months before this the family of the young man will again visit the home of the bride in order to make her acquaintance. On this occasion the young girl is introduced to her prospective family to whom she offers a foot kiss.[4] She is then handed a gift on behalf of her fiancé. This is usually some small item selected from a range of everyday necessities and is termed a 'peninset'.

The evening before the wedding day, which is called 'Binei', marriage rituals begin in the home of the bride with 'pacar-pacar'. Several days before this the bride and the bridegroom paint their fingernails, and the groom also paints the souls of his feet, with pacar red. Pacar is the finely ground leaves of a pacar tree which grows everywhere in Java and the leaves of which are generally used to colour fingernails red.

In the largest room of the house which is decorated for the festivity, a *kwadé*, a sort of shrine, is constructed. A bench is positioned inside this in front of which are placed the ingredients for pacar-pacar. These consist, besides a tray holding a finger bowl and a serviette, of a sebrit, (a bowl sitting on a base) containing seven different perfumes in little bottles as well as five small bowls filled with pacar, 'glepong lawar' (rice meal), 'lulur' (a yellow paste to freshen up the skin), 'menjak wangi' (a type of oil) and 'beras kuning' (grains of yellow rice).

On this, her last evening as a maiden, the bride dresses in a red 'kain kurasi' (a red cotton kain) – rich people wear a 'kain caol putih' (an expensive material from Arabia) – and a white 'baju kurong' (a baatje). On her feet she wears socks and muiltjes and around her neck she wears a tight-fitting red coral necklace. Other jewelry decorates her breast, arms and ears while flowers decorate her hair. She sits on the bench in the kwade surrounded by the female guests, who are arranged around her on the floor. A red cushion lies on her lap on which she must place her hands, palm upwards. The woman, who will later help her with the pacar-pacar, sits on the ground beside her.

The oldest member of the family, for instance the grandmother of the bride, opens the proceedings. She comes to sit before the heroine of the festivities where upon the girl slides down from her bench and offers her a foot kiss.

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[4] This ritual, also used in Javanese ritual, involved a supplicant seeking forgiveness or blessing kneeling before a superior or parent's knees.

Thereafter she immediately resumes her seat and again presents her palms on the cushion in the manner prescribed. The older woman now sprinkles the girl's hands with the perfumes after which she covers her palms with some of the pacar-pacar and then with the contents of all the other small bowls set out on the 'sembrit'. When this process is complete the woman sitting beside the bride, removes all the ingredients that cover her palms and washes and dries her hands with a serviette. Once again the bride then slides from her raised seat and kisses her grandmother's feet, upon which the latter withdraws, and another takes her place to repeat the entire 'pacar process' all over again. All the guests take their turn and the bride gives all the older women a foot kiss and the younger ones a hand kiss.

If both families are well off and the wedding, therefore, is celebrated elaborately, the bridegroom also visits the home of his bride on the Brinei evening. However he may not see her so he has to be taken to a different part of the house.

The following day the bridegroom, accompanied by the wali of the bride, usually either her father or her brother or an uncle on the father's side, goes to the Misigit (mosque) where the Pangulu (the head priest) blesses the marriage.

In the evening of the same day, or even that afternoon, the formal meeting between the couple, till then both complete strangers to each other, takes place for the first time. For this occasion the bride wears a 'kain songket' (a silk kain with gold thread woven through it) and a plain red cotton or silk baatje. Her forehead along the hairline is painted with black crescents and triangles that contrast sharply with her powdered face. Her eyes are edged with dark blue, almost black paint, which make them look larger and deeper than they actually are. Many flowers and jewels complete the bride's outfit. The bridegroom is dressed in Arabic attire with some flowers pinned above his ears.

Sitting in the kwade the bride awaits her bridegroom and when a tambourine sound heralds his arrival, the doors to the room where the women are waiting are quickly closed. Two women stand guard by the door through which the young man will soon enter, holding a selendang stretched tightly across the opening as a token barrier.

On approaching the house the bridegroom, proceeded and followed by a crowd of friends and acquaintances and by the numerous unknown nontonners (spectators) who are always attracted to these kinds of festivities, he and his friends are suddenly showered with flowers, a 'beras kuning'. This extraordinary rain, originating from several copper bowls held by some neneks (old women) who stand at the front of the house is, according to old beliefs, to protect the young couple from any ill.

The procession continues, all the while being bombarded with these strange projectiles, until it finally reaches the front door. Finding this locked, the bridegroom and his companions bang on the door with all their might, trying everything they can to force it open but the women inside offer steadfast resistance.

'Open up! Open up!' the group outside call out, to which the women answer: 'The door will open only after you pay us!'

The men agree and with loud acclaim the door is opened. However the selendang is still stretched across the opening. This is removed only when the bridegroom thrusts several silver coins into the hand of the tukang paes (the woman who is paid to dress the bride). Two women grasp the young man by his arms and bring him to his wife who, lead by the tukang paes, takes a few steps towards him. The young couple shake each other by the hand, after which the woman bows and kisses the man's hand. When she raises her head she receives from him his first gift to her as her husband. It is a metal peperhuisje filled with sirih and money.

The young couple then take their place on the bench in the kwade, on either side of which are seated the female guests; the male guests sit in another room.

After a while the tukang paes relieves the bride of her present which till then she had been holding in her hand or on her lap and holds it for her.

The couple is then provided with a plate of nasi kuning (yellow coloured rice) while in the middle of the room a large pile of hardboiled eggs is assembled which the Kojas call 'ajuran'. The tukang paes then takes a handful of rice and shapes it into two balls that she hands to each of the two. Then, while the guests plunder the ajuran, the couple feed each other the rice. After this, when all have resumed their earlier positions, the guests are offered all kinds of refreshments and a little later they all take their places for a slametan (offering feast). They continue chatting happily to each other (omong omong) till well into the night even after the bridal pair have retired.

During the following three days after the wedding the brides remains in seclusion. She may not leave the house and for most of the time she stays in the bridal room where the bright red decoration with which it is festooned would certainly hurt one's eyes. The bridal bed is surrounded by a red curtain and as well all the bed linen is of red cotton or red silk.

When these three days of house arrest have passed the bathing ritual ('mandi-mandi') takes place.

Preparations for this are made next to a well somewhere in the grounds behind the house. A bench is placed between two fruit-bearing banana trees and 'tebu's rejono (a kind of sugarcane) which have been planted there for the

occasion. In front of this is a 'papan cuki' (a kind of draughtboard), on which has been placed several sheaves of rice. The banana trees, the sugarcane and the padi are intended to represent the silent prayers of the family to the Almighty: may the couple be as fertile as the banana tree, their married life as sweet as the sugarcane, and may the young couple never be without the – unmissable – rice.

On a table close by the bench are placed two 'cengkir gading' (young yellow coconut) from which the stems have been removed and certain ritual prayers in Arabic have been inscribed in the husk. Next to this is a kendi containing water blessed by holy men with traditional sayings, a large bowl of lulur, several candles and two yellow kains. Two large containers are placed next to this, one containing clear well water the other aer setaman (water into which all kinds of flowers have been dropped).

The young pair make their way to the bathing place dressed in their wedding costumes accompanied by family and other female acquaintances. Upon arrival they remove their beautiful wedding clothes and replace these with the yellow kain, after which they take their places on the bench. Older blood relatives throw several buckets of water over them and then thickly rub their faces, hands and feet with lulur. After this they are doused with the flower water and finally the coconuts filled to the brim with coconut water are slowly emptied over the couple's heads. Both are now given a few mouthfuls of the blessed water, some of which they must keep in their mouths and, at a particular moment, they must spit this out in each other's faces.

The candles are then lit and two people, each walking in an opposite direction, carry these three times around the couple. At the completion of the third round the candles are presented to them and they must then immediately blow out the flame. Whoever's candle goes out first will be the inferior partner in the marriage.

During the bathing ritual the spectators also rub themselves with lulur which generates a lively to do. Quite often, regardless of the best intentions, heated exchanges takes place as a result of this activity that often end in a general affray of punching, scratching and abuse.

After the soaking-wet couple have left the mandi-mandi some older attendees take the sheaves of padi from the papan-cuki and strike these three times on the ground while mumbling prayers, then drop them to the ground. The rest of the spectators then roughly fight each other to get even a few grains with which those who are successful then run off. According to tradition, the rice will bring good luck to those who have been successful.

In the meantime a great 'slametan' is organized and after the mandi-mandi all the guest take their places there, including the newly married couple who

have now resumed their wedding clothes. After this meal the young couple, accompanied by several family members, visits blood relatives, friends and acquaintances to present them with a foot or hand kiss.

Usually, five days after the wedding the parents of the groom come to fetch their daughter-in-law and son to spend some time with them.

If the young man does not yet have his own home, and if both his and his in-laws live in the same place, he will take his wife to live for several weeks with each in turn.

1979
PERINGATAN
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R.A.KARTINI
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Part Five:
The Educational Memoranda

RA. KARTINI DJOJO ADHININGRAT
LAHIR : DJEPARA 21 APRIL 1879
WAFAT : REMBANG 17 SEPTEMBER 1904
BAGUH MARMER YOGYAKARTA

INTRODUCTION

Kartini's resolve to study in the Netherlands grew out of her determination to make a contribution to the advancement of her people. As the correspondence makes clear, her determination was inspired by her reading of feminist literature which emphasized the right of women to be educated and to work, and the importance of their contribution to society as educators and mothers. The Netherlands represented not only the place where she could get access to that knowledge but where she could be freed from the strictures of Javanese tradition *and* of colonialism. Until July 1903 she continued to assert: 'Only if we were in Europe would we be completely free' (Letter to the Abendanons, 14 July 1903).

First mooted in 1900, the plan for Europe dominates much of the correspondence either directly or as the cause of conflict with or criticism from those around her, in particular her mothers. Maintaining this goal required constantly seeking the support of her European correspondents, while the need for her father's approval continually made her doubt her resolve. In the background the correspondence reveals that, while arrangements were being made in Europe on her behalf by her brother, by ladies of the court, by organizations 'interested in the advancement of the colony', and by a group of Dutch parliamentarians, closer to home, alternative plans were being laid. In the course of 1902 two alternative trajectories, one spearheaded by socialist parliamentarian Henri van Kol and one by liberal reformer and colonial director of education, Jacques Abendanon, were on offer to Kartini. Both required an approach to government to seek financial support; both could lead to the goal of becoming a teacher. Until the last, Kartini maintained the importance of going to Europe, yet increasingly it is the importance of Java – of discovering and being in Java – that tips the balance. Kartini struggles with the two alternatives till the last moment; it influences what she writes to whom and when, and is influenced by those whom she meets or from whom she receives letters.

This dramatic narrative gave rise to two important statements prepared in 1903 and directed to the Dutch and colonial governments respectively. They bring together all the statements that can be found scattered throughout Kartini's correspondence concerning her aims for her own future, the importance of access to Western education for women and the emancipation and advancement of Java in general. Their significance lies in their public formulation of a vision of a future later elaborated by more famous nationalists. Each was

written in collaboration with and on behalf of her sister, Roekmini. They were preceded by an earlier shorter statement, usually overlooked, that was prepared in 1902 and which essentially defined the core issues. This earlier draft was prepared for and at the request of Henri van Kol following his meeting with Kartini in April (Letter to van Kol, 21 June 1902) for use in his subsequent approach to the Dutch government. This and the later memoranda were 'rehearsed' in letters to various correspondents, pointing to the importance of the letter-writing in not only developing and maintaining useful connections but in practising and distilling the ideas, terms and approach that Kartini used to articulate her ideal for the emancipation of Java.

The two more substantial memoranda, while apparently similar, were written at significantly different moments in the development of this narrative. The first she completed with Europe in mind in January, to be read in the Netherlands and to supplement the brief statement she prepared for van Kol. The second, a much delayed petition first mooted in 1901, was prepared at the request of the colonial director of education, intended for the colonial bureaucracy and representing a petition for government funds to enable Kartini to study to become a qualified teacher.

Comparing the two documents reveals the difference in their provenance. Although the two documents clearly express very similar ideas, the second is more personal and is less concerned to make the broader claims for which the first document is notable. The first reads and has rightly been regarded as a significant polemic by a colonial subject. It is a demand for access to an entitlement: education for women for self-improvement and for the advancement of the nation. As an extended statement on Javanese 'advancement', it can also be compared to the long lecture her brother delivered in Ghent in 1899, entitled 'The Dutch Language in the Indies' of which undoubtedly Kartini had a copy.[1] Its content, apart from the male inflection of its examples, clearly reveals the similarity in thinking between these two siblings, who essentially make the same case regarding the value of Dutch education to enable Javanese to help themselves.

Kartono in turn had no doubt drawn on the memorandum written by his uncle, RMAA Hadiningrat and later published in the *Tijdschift voor het Binnenlands Bestuur* in 1896 entitled 'De Achteruitgang van het Prestige der Inlandsche Hoofden en de Middelen om Daarin Verbetering te Brengen'.[2] Importantly, however, in their proposals both Kartono and Kartini had

1 The text of this speech is reproduced in Coté 2005a.

2 'The Decline in the Prestige of Native Nobility and the Means Whereby Improvements in This Could Be Made'

dramatically changed the focus from an exclusive concern with the 'prestige' of an elite to a broader vision of renovating Javanese society as a whole. Nevertheless, there also remains a clear difference: while her brother addressed the demand of Javanese men to participate in the governance and advancement of their own people, Kartini's emphasis is on the role educated Javanese women could play in the renovation of Javanese society as a whole.

The first memorandum would have gained broad interest because of the notoriety surrounding Kartini's case which was then being discussed in the Netherlands. Composed in the last days of January 1903, the memorandum that has gained the title 'Geef de Javaan Opvoeding' ('Give the Javanese education!') was written in response to a request from an official of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, Mr J Slingenberg, while he was on a visit to Batavia.[3] Apparently intending to visit and interview Kartini in Jepara in person but in the end unable to do so, the official listed a series of written questions for her to answer. This was conveyed to Kartini by her Dutch friend, the Jepara school teacher, Anneke Glaser, who was at the time visiting the Abendanon family in Batavia.[4]

The second document, the actual petition Kartini was required to provide to explain the reasons for the request for a scholarship to study, involved her sister Roekmini since the plan had always been for the two sisters to study (or travel to the Netherlands) together. Written according to Abendanon's suggestion that she prepare something 'straight from the heart', this petition had been delayed for almost a year while Kartini sought and gradually succeeded in gaining the approval of her parents, who did eventually agree to her to study abroad. Here the emphasis is particularly on her own future and the role of Javanese women in Java's advancement.

In accordance with colonial protocol, petitions to the central government needed to be sent via the bureaucratic hierarchy. It thus began its journey in the office of the regional colonial official, Resident Piet Sijthoff (see letter of 27 April 1903). He, like his colleague the director of education, supported the application on condition that it be applied to her education in Batavia and not in the Netherlands. (See further amplification of this process in the general Introduction). In the end this petition and the scholarship application to which it was appended were successful (in part it seems because of the intervention by Henri van Kol), but at almost the same moment that this news reached her she received a marriage proposal in extraordinary circumstances.

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3 See Kartini's letter to EC Abendanon, 31 January 1903.

4 Correspondence of J Slingenberg to JH Abendanon, Amsterdam, 4/2/1910, KITLV, Archive H. 1200 n. 241.

Even then Kartini expressed the hope that she might still be able to delay the marriage until she completed her study, but again this plan was thwarted.

In September 1903, Kartini wrote what could be regarded as her fourth public memorandum related to her quest for education. It defined the new pathway she had rationalized for achieving her goal. While this contrasted sharply to her earlier 'statement of intention' and plans outlined in her correspondence, the underlying aims remained substantially the same. Throughout these petitions Kartini emphasized the importance of schools for girls of the elite classes and the importance of Dutch language education for them. This emphasis was highlighted in the later Kartini Schools established with Dutch philanthropic support. Notably, her own classroom commenced in the Jepara kabupaten was a much humbler institution in which Javanese was the language of instruction. This was the model later adopted by her sister, Kardinah, in founding a girls' school in Tegal.

STATEMENT OF INTENTION[1]

Raden Ajeng Kartini, daughter of Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosroningrat, Regent of Jepara, aged 23, born in Mayong, District of Jepara on 21 April 1879, wishes to be trained as a teacher (assistant and head teacher certificate) and to undertake this course in the Netherlands.

The latter condition is in the first place to enable her to extend her perspective, to broaden her intellectual horizons, and to rid her of the prejudices that remain and restrict her, and to visit different educational and training institutions there to become familiar with the latest approaches to education in the Netherlands. This she wishes to undertake in order to be able to better fulfil the task she wishes to take on.

Secondly, she wishes to undertake courses in health, patient care and first aid as well as initial accident assistance in order to teach this highly useful and essential knowledge to Javanese women.

The main purpose is: to be able to pass on to our people the best of Dutch culture in order to enrich their customs; as a means to raise them to a higher level of morality; as a means to bring about better, more felicitous social conditions.

My request is, whether the Government is willing to lend me its support to realize the aims expressed above: to in the first instance take on the cost of the entire education (travel there and back, study, living costs), and later, at the completion of my studies, to make it possible for me to establish a boarding school for the daughters of Native officials.

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[1] This is the text incorporated into a letter to Henri van Kol, 21 June 1902. The remainder of the letter provides further instructions for van Kol.

GIVE THE JAVANESE EDUCATION![1]

Jepara, January 1903

While it may be absolutely impossible to provide an entire population of 27 million people with education immediately, it would not be impossible to begin by providing education to the upper layers of that population and developing it in such a way that they could be of benefit to those below them. The people are very attached to their nobility; what emanates from them finds ready acceptance amongst them.

What advantage has been taken of this fact that could be of benefit to all parties: the Government, the nobility and the people? To date more or less the only advantage has been to ensure law and order and the regular receipt of revenue. The State and the nobility have benefited from this but what have the people themselves gained? What benefit have the people had from their highly revered nobles who the Government uses to rule them? To date, nothing, or very little; more likely they have been disadvantaged on those occasions when the nobility has abused its power, which is still not a rare occurrence.

This must change, the nobility must earn the reverence of the people, be worthy of it, and this will be of inestimable benefit to the people. The Government must prepare the nobility for this and this can only be achieved by giving the nobility a sound education, one not exclusively based on an intellectual education but one that also provides a moral education. This principle must not be lost sight of in any education to be provided for the Javanese.

It is claimed that the one follows from the other, that by developing the intellect, character is automatically refined. There are an infinite number of examples that prove that an advanced intellectual development is no guarantee for moral superiority!

But one should not be too hard on those individuals whose moral character remains coarse and unrefined: in most cases the fault lies not with them but with their education. Great care was taken with their intellectual development but what had been done for the training of their character? Nothing! Without the inclusion of moral education even the best of education systems could not hope to achieve the results that might be expected of it.

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[1] Reproduced in *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, 1911. The original was provided to Abendanon by J Slingenberg, probably in February 1910 together with his summary (see KITLV Archive, H.1200:241).

And Native society has a great need for an improvement of its moral foundations, without which the measures taken by the Government, however well intentioned they may be, will, if not totally fail, at best have only minimal results. Therefore the moral basis of Native society must be improved; once a decent moral basis has been established then the seeds of progress can be successfully cultivated.

Who could deny that the woman has a great task to perform in the moral development of society? It is she, precisely she, who is the one to do this; she can contribute much, if not most, to ensure the improvement of the moral standards of society. Nature herself has appointed her to this task. As mother, she is the first educator; at her knee the child first learns to feel, to think, to speak; and in most cases, this initial nurturing influences the rest of its life. It is the hand of the mother which first plants the germ of virtue or wickedness in the heart of the individual where it usually remains for the rest of the person's life. Not without reason is it said that a knowledge of right and wrong is imbibed with a mother's milk. But how can Javanese mothers now educate their children if they themselves are uneducated? The education and development of the Javanese people can never adequately advance if women are excluded, if they are not given a role to play in this. Develop the hearts and minds of Javanese women and one will have a powerful collaborator in that beautiful and gigantic task: the enlightenment of a people which numbers millions! Give Java fine, intelligent mothers and the improvement, the raising of a people, will be but a matter of time.

In the meantime provide education, instruction, for the daughters of the nobility; the civilizing influence has to flow from here to the people. Develop them into capable, wise, fine mothers and they will vigorously spread enlightenment amongst the people. They will pass on their refinement and education to their children: to their daughters, who in their turn will become mothers; to their sons who will be called upon to help safeguard the welfare of the people. And as persons of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment they will, in many different ways, be of assistance to their people and to their society.

As far as is known the present Director of Education, Religion and Industry[2] is the only official in the Government who has paid any attention to the significance of women to the development of the Javanese people and who has also taken some steps in that direction. Unfortunately, his attempts have been doomed because of the lack of cooperation on the part of the very people who would have benefited from those efforts, as would the rest of the Javanese

[2] The reference is to Jacques Abendanon.

people. The Regents, whose advice was sought on this matter, in general, considered that the time was not yet ripe to establish schools for the daughters of Native administrators and other notables.

Yet, what does one see in practice? The Regents offering such advice consider the time was ripe for their daughters to receive an enlightened education and provided it for them. The issue is: while at the moment European education is not widely available, and in particular not for Native girls, each for himself would very much like his children to receive the best available education but does not want to recommend it to others, or encourage others to partake of it because, while desiring education for themselves, they do not wish to see others similarly educated. Were schools widely available, everyone would have their children attend and then all would have the same education that it is now desired to be had exclusively.

A prominent educated Native administrator has said perceptively in relation to this: 'The Javanese and particularly the nobility prefer to have white rice on their table which they begrudge others; for others, red rice is good enough.'

'Keep the majority in ignorance, then one retains power in one's hands' could be the slogan of many, many of those in high positions, who regard with some hostility the fact that others are also striving for knowledge and development.

It is well known that many a 'dukun' (Native healer) with knowledge of a secret remedy for some illness or other, takes his secret with him to the grave, not even being willing to entrust it to his own children. The feeling of solidarity is totally absent from Native society and this is what desperately needs to be developed because without it, the progress of the entire people will not be possible.

This characteristic attitude, to keep the best for oneself and to regard this as a right, arises in the nobility from a deep-rooted false notion that the nobles are an absolutely superior people, beings of a higher order than the population at large, and consequently have a right to the best of everything! Once again, mothers can do much to help eradicate such notions that act to inhibit progress. But instead of this, the mother of noble birth now encourages her child, when the infant is not even yet able to stand, to scream if it is not addressed with its appropriate title!

Really, an important factor in the uplifting of the population will be the progress of the Javanese woman! Therefore it should be the first task of the Government to raise the moral awareness of the Javanese woman, to educate her, to instruct her, to make of her a capable, wise mother and nurturer! Enrolment at private and government schools indicates that more and more Native administrators also desire an enlightened education for their daughters.

There are several Regents who together with their children also have their children's mothers instructed by female European teachers. And even more parents would allow their daughters to be taught if only there was an opportunity to do so; because girls' schools do not exist everywhere and parents are reluctant to send girls to a mixed school.

Over the past few years a subsidized private school has been conducted by a female European teacher in the Preanger especially for children of the Native nobility. Both boys and girls attend that school but are taught in separate classrooms and the boys leave for home earlier so that the children of either sex cannot meet each other, in accordance with the customs of the region. There is no need to debate this further, Native society only needs to be made aware of the fact that there is already a school in existence – but only one – for the daughters of the Native officials. Success of such a school could be guaranteed simply by the personal qualities, the reputation and recognized abilities of the individual who conducted that school, but the Government also has a role to play here. It can promote that success by providing the school with as much support as it needs and beyond that, in some way or another, to indicate that it values the advancement of the Javanese woman!

Javanese people, like any traditional people, are most susceptible to glitter and show. Well then, satisfy this trait, but at the same time offer something substantial and of lasting value! Compare the example of children to whom one wants to give medicine for the sake of their health. If one simply places the tablets in front of them, for instance, then they will only be taken with reluctance and then only after much enticement, exhortation and, in the end, threats; but offer them the same tablets with sugar and wrapped in silver or gold paper then, 9 times out of 10, the children will immediately and eagerly reach for it. When they become more mature there will be need neither for the sugar nor the wrapping to take the pill because they will then realize it is essential for their health.

Would the example provided half a century ago by the late Pangeran of Demak – the first Javanese to give his children a European education – have had such an influence had not the Government so clearly shown its appreciation of this action?[3] Four sons and two grandsons of this Pangeran have been and are Regents, and men in a position to judge have been and are full of praise for this family of Regents. It is true that the Government profits directly from the actions of that Native official; the advancement of Javanese women, however,

[3] The reference is to Kartini's grandfather, Condronegoro.

would be of benefit to the entire Native society. This has been demonstrated and must be apparent to anyone who thinks about it.

Schools cannot advance society by themselves: the home must cooperate in this. And it is from the home in particular that moral guidance must come – after all the family influence is present day and night; the school only several hours a day. But how is it possible at the moment for the home to provide this nurture when such an important element in it, the wife, the mother, is totally unprepared for this nurturing role?

Were the Government to indicate by some means that would appeal to the Javanese population, that it also valued the advancement of the Javanese woman, it would significantly promote this cause. Such support would be more effective than any other. It would have a greater effect than if, for instance, the Government directly commanded that all Native administrators had to send their daughters to school, an edict which the Government would never issue!

If the nobility knew that the Government desired that its daughters be more highly cultured then, initially, it may not send its daughters from personal conviction, but it would nevertheless send them of their own volition. The nobility must be encouraged in this direction. What does it matter with what motives their daughters are sent to school? The issue is that they are sent to school!

With those who are to teach the girls entrusted to them, lies the task of developing, to the best of their abilities, women who are refined and cultured, who are aware of their MORAL VOCATION in society, to become its loving mothers: wise, upright nurturers and, beyond that, to be of service to society in every way, at a time when so much help is needed.

For the time being a single school could be opened, a boarding institution so that children could be totally educated in its spirit; however the institution should also be open to day pupils. The medium of instruction should be the Dutch language. It is only the knowledge of a European language, and in the first instance of course, Dutch, which will in the foreseeable future be able to civilize and bring spiritual freedom to the upper layers of Native society![4]

The best means to learn that language is by thinking and speaking in that language whenever possible. It is not necessary that thereby one's own language should be neglected: this should receive attention second only to the learning of Dutch.

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[4] This effectively defines the purpose of the later Kartini Schools, but is significantly different to the classroom she began with her sister in July.

It would be highly desirable if all the works of European literature which could have a beneficial and uplifting influence on the Javanese were translated into that language. And this should be done! But, at the moment these do not exist and will not in the near future.

Must the Javanese in the interim then grow up in ignorance when 'more light' is so desperately needed in a society that has such need for better moral foundations upon which to base its material progress? It is not the intention to teach the Dutch language to the entire Javanese people: what use would the agricultural labourer, the woodcutter, the grass cutter etc. have for Dutch? It should be taught only to those elements of society who have an aptitude for, and are suited to, learning Dutch, and at all times it should be made clear to such pupils and one should work with this in view: that knowledge of the Dutch language by itself does not represent cultural refinement, that being civilized consists of something more than simply speaking Dutch, or superficially adopting Dutch manners, and even less in wearing Dutch clothes. Knowledge of Dutch language is the key that can unlock the treasure houses of Western civilization and knowledge; one has to exert oneself to appropriate some of that treasure for oneself.

A goodly number of people must be formed, cultivated in mind and spirit, people thoroughly conversant with their own language and affairs and alongside this also in Dutch and European knowledge. These leaders must process the New on behalf of their countrymen so that the latter may appropriate it later for themselves!

All significant works of European literature should be translated into Javanese and presented to the Javanese people; then see what the people think of it!

* * * *

For those who failed to receive appropriate moral training in infancy and later childhood – which is the case for almost the entire Javanese population – it is possible to provide this important aspect of education in later life. This may sometimes happen by chance, through contact with noble or knowledgeable people who may take an interest in such a person's spiritual development, or who unintentionally educate by providing noble models.

A further means of education from which much benefit can be expected is reading material. It would be an excellent additional source of instruction. The Javanese has practically no reading material; what he does have are some epic poems and moral tales which even then are only available to very few, since almost all of them are handwritten; they represent heirlooms passed down from generation to generation and many of them are written allegorically and

in a language which is unintelligible to most people. Moreover, by and large, the Javanese interprets what he reads literally so that he tends to lose most, if not all, its practical value.

For example, in Javanese ethics abstinence from food and sleep is recommended as the means to success in the material world and in the after world. Very fine sentiments underlie this precept but these are lost to the masses. People fast, are hungry, do not sleep and imagine that they have achieved it, while in the meantime the fine idea has escaped them. 'Not eating, drinking or sleeping is the aim of life!' rather than – 'Through suffering (effort, self-restraint and self-denial) one achieves a refined state.'

And it is like this with many things.

The Javanese should be given reading material written in a popular and generally comprehensible language, neither sermons nor light-hearted, superficial banalities, but simple, fresh, entertainingly-told stories, scenes from real life, from the past and also from the world of the imagination, and in so doing, keeping constantly in mind that there must always be a moral educational purpose. In this way, while being pleasantly entertained, the Javanese receives food for the mind and soul as well as useful hints for everyday life.

Books and storybooks of this type must be written for adults and children and then also journals and magazines must be published, appearing weekly or monthly, covering a wide range of topics that can broaden horizons, develop the mind and edify the spirit. This should definitely not be the typical reading matter of newspapers which concern themselves with fires, theft and murder, and anonymous slandering and flattery. Readers of these magazines should have the opportunity to pose questions on all kinds of topics that would be answered either by the editors or by fellow readers. And, as far as possible, such a magazine should promote the exchange and interaction of ideas amongst readers themselves.

In a similar vein to the question of the establishment of a school for the daughters of Native administrators, the introduction of such a magazine should also be first attempted on a small scale. After all it is quite simple to expand gradually while it is most disheartening to begin on a large scale and have little success.

The appearance of the Malay-Dutch language illustrated journal *Bintang Hindia* is a most encouraging development.[5] It is produced in Holland by a group of people of the younger generation undertaking their higher studies

[5] This periodical was founded in the Netherlands 1902 by HCC Clockener Brousson and edited by Abdul Rivai. It was widely circulated amongst Western educated

at educational institutions in the Netherlands. They are young men, full of love and enthusiasm for their land and countrymen who they want to guide towards greater cultural development! These efforts should be supported.

* * * *

General knowledge about the Indies and its people should be spread widely amongst Dutch people; were they to get to know about the Javanese from an unbiased point of view, prejudice would disappear so that not only the educated, but also the ordinary Dutch person would come to regard the Javanese as a fellow being who, through no fault of his own, is his spiritual inferior and not because his skin colour is brown.

Books written in this spirit for Dutch people would be most beneficial to both Java and to the Netherlands itself and it would be of even greater value and influence if a child of the people itself could reveal that people to the Netherlands! For that reason also it would be very good if the Javanese were taught Dutch – they would then be understood all the better when expressing themselves in that language and in this medium tell of their desires, requirements and needs.

But why should an interest in the Indies be developed among the Dutch only as adults? Could this not be begun earlier? Schools offer a perfect opportunity for this, both in the Netherlands and in the Indies. In schools, readers could be included amongst the textbooks which provide a clear picture of the land, people, traditions, customs and conditions in Java – no dull, learned, knowledgeable texts, but entertaining literature such as children are fond of reading and which contain solid information about that beautiful country and that gentle brown people far across the sea.

But to provide schoolchildren with a real understanding of the Indies it would not be sufficient to use books only, no matter how well and with what knowledge they were written. It is also essential that teachers possess a greater understanding of the Indies than is the case at present if only to avoid the situation where they are unable to answer the curious child who, having read something about the Indies, asks for further information. Would it not be advisable to introduce a new subject in the teacher training school: an extended and thorough study of the Indies?[6]

Indonesians, presenting ideas about development in the Indies broadly in line with those of Kartini. Articles were in Dutch and Malay, with Dutch and Indonesian contributors.

6 Presumably Kartini has in mind the experience of her teacher friend, Anneke Glaser.

Oh, every opportunity should be utilized to invoke an interest in the Indies in the Netherlands and especially amongst the young! The children of today will be the rulers of the Indies tomorrow!

Even more effective than the most popular literature in creating an interest in the Indies in the Netherlands would be information provided by visual displays. Exhibitions of Indies' arts and crafts could be held, such as the one Oost en West arranged in The Hague with, where possible, people in traditional settings, for example a Native home with inhabitants (real Javanese) and gamelan.[7] These would be exhibited in many, many places in the country, open for as low an entry fee as possible so that ordinary people could attend. Such an exposition should be collated and put on view throughout the Netherlands.

It is tragic for the Indies and shameful for the Netherlands that in general, Dutch people, not excluding the more educated, know so very little about the Indies. One means by which the Government can raise the standard of development and welfare in the Indies, and at the same time benefit the Netherlands itself, is undoubtedly to foster a knowledge of the Indies amongst the Dutch, to stimulate an interest in the East.

A beneficial influence can be exerted on the people by the Dutch in the Indies. Each educated European, particularly those who, through their work, come into direct contact either with the nobility or with the people, can in some way or another be an educator or a benefactor of the Javanese. They can exercise a beneficial personal influence by, for instance, providing assistance in cases of illness or accidents. What a blessed influence could emanate personally from the officials who have a direct contact with the leaders of the land, with Native officials and the nobility.

But what can be seen of this personal influence? By and large very little, extremely little! There are some officials who are remembered with gratitude, who did have a feeling for the brown race which they ruled, who did not regard their subordinate Native officials as their inferiors in everything – whose duty it was to worship them – but as fellow human beings and comrades.[8]

Oh, if only better relations could be developed between European and Native officials, that such a relationship became the norm and no longer was the exception! A concern with 'prestige' stands like a dividing wall to prevent this, keeping the European and Native elements apart. Would not both the

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7 This had been undertaken at the 1898 Exhibition of Women's Work to which Kartini had sent exhibits, but also at subsequent Dutch pavilions at international exhibitions such as the Paris World Exhibition in 1900. She would also have in mind the successful local Oost en West exhibition of Javanese arts and crafts in Batavia in 1902.

8 Kartini was evidently writing from personal experience here.

Netherlands and the Indies benefit if the Dutch in general, and civil servants in particular, sought other means to uphold 'prestige' than they do now.

In the long term it will be apparent that humanitarian attitudes will be and are a better means to bind Java to the Netherlands than if the Dutch, and specifically civil servants, attempt to invoke an attitude of awe for Dutch rule in the population by placing themselves on an 'elevated plane of godly worship'. Native officials show Europeans the same respect they show their own rulers because they know this is what the gentlemen desire – but whether they do so voluntarily ???!

The Dutch official has sufficiently high standing not to have to accept any other token of respect than that which comes from the heart!

The European woman can also have a beneficial influence on Native society here. There are instances of Native girls who, already having a cultured background, furthered their development through the influence of European women.[9] In the future, this will be of benefit to Native society as these women are fully conscious of the moral duty they have to fulfil there.

The benefit that the Netherlands itself obtains from such acts of humanity on the part of its daughters is that they have planted in the hearts of these Native women and their families a love for their land, their nation. They themselves have come to know the Javanese people better. It has therefore led to mutual respect and trust that will be of benefit to both parties.

There is a tremendous amount of fine work to be undertaken in the Indies by Europeans and by European women in particular. With a little goodwill it would be so very easy for them to gain the affection of the inhabitants. It has been claimed that the Javanese are ungrateful. Oh! – if only they could hear these 'ingrates' speak with overwhelming love and respect for Europeans who have shown them affection, then they would not say this. The Javanese is very sensitive to genuine friendliness. Europeans must take the initiative: a Javanese will never, of his own accord, approach the European, for that he is too shy, too timid – and after all the European has yet to win his trust.

And all this is possible if a sound knowledge of the Indies becomes general in the Netherlands. It must be disseminated amongst the young in schools and at home, it must be impressed upon them that the Netherlands has a moral duty to fulfil in regard to the Indies, that beautiful, rich land across the sea, to which Great Netherlands owes its position as a Colonial Power. People in the Netherlands need to learn to ask themselves the question: 'What would the Netherlands be without the Indies' and the Netherlands

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[9] Again Kartini's personal experience is evident here.

needs to teach the Indies to consider: 'What would the Indies be without the Netherlands?'

With regard to popular education, the proposals of the present Regent of Ngawi should be considered.[10] Beyond that, it would be advisable to examine the educational institutions, the technical schools, etc. of Mojowarno[11] and study their results carefully. Why should such beneficial institutions as exist at Mojowarno not be established in other places in Java? If the religious element were excluded and if it was organized in this regard on a strictly neutral basis, then there would be no danger to fear from the fanatical elements of the population. Without the religious propaganda, this fine work could be extended throughout Java without fear that it might incite the opposition of fanatics.

Inwardly the Javanese more or less despise a fellow countryman, formerly of their religion, who has abandoned his old belief and embraced Christianity. A Muslim regards this as the greatest sin. And for his part, the Native who has become Christian more or less regards with contempt his compatriot and former co-religionist, the Javanese who has remained a Muslim. He regards himself as having been raised above the latter now that he professes the same belief as the Whites, considering himself to be their equal in all things.

Provide the Javanese with education, teach him to think independently and when he has matured intellectually, allow him to choose his own religious direction. Allow him to undertake baptism from personal conviction, no one should prevent this as Christianity would only benefit from this and it would result in more upright, pious believers in its community. Should he wish to retain the traditions and beliefs of his ancestors, then so be it!

Teach the Javanese by word and deed what true civilization, true love is. True culture lies not in the colour of the skin, not in the clothes, not in the outward behaviour, not in the language of the speaker, nor in the name of the religion one confesses. True culture resides in one's heart. It is a matter of character and nobility of the soul. It is this that must be developed amongst all races of all religious persuasions to the glory of God, the one true God, the Father of Creation.

Would that the Netherlands sent to the Indies children of God, angels of love, who would be a blessing to the Javanese people.

There should be more schools for Native officials; one in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya as well as other schools specifically for jaksas (Native justice

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10 Kartini is referring to proposals for practical elementary schools by RM Koesoemo Oetoyo, the basis of the three-year 'village schools' commenced in 1907.

11 An active 'experimental' education program for Javanese children was developed by mission educationist J Kats at the Mojowarno mission centre.

officials) in which young students could be specifically trained for this branch of the civil service. Dutch should be the medium of instruction in all these schools. Regularly each year more apply for admission to schools for Native officials, at least 5 times more, than there are places. Were there more such schools, then in the near future officials could be recruited solely from the pupils of such schools.[12] It does not have to be demonstrated that the country would profit substantially from this.

At the moment the civil service is made up largely of magang whose training is not particularly good. For most magangs, training consists of a Native elementary schooling after which they enter a 'magang' with a European or Native official assisting with clerical and copying work. After being employed not infrequently for many years in this way and often without pay, they may be appointed clerk on the recommendation of their civil service master, that is, to the same position. The difference is that now they receive a salary from the Government which they have already served for years and enter the civil service that gives them entitlement to privileges found so attractive by our child-like people – a right to a payung (sun umbrella) and the wearing of shiny 'W' buttons.[13] In this way many arrive very late in life at the lowest ranks of the civil service ladder.

Is this in the interests of the service? Perhaps age has the advantage of experience over youth (but what can the experience have been if all this time was spent outside the service?). Youth has one undeniable advantage over age: freshness. And if coupled with this freshness there is also accomplishment, what can one then not expect? Then the rule in promotion can be that less consideration be given to seniority and more to capacity and suitability of the civil servant being considered for promotion.

The principle being followed by the Government lately in the appointment of top Native officials, that is the Regents, is particularly to be applauded. Three men, of whom two were still quite young and one even still outside the civil service, but well-educated, were appointed to the highest positions. All three had completed the H.B.S., one even had done so in the Netherlands. This brings fresh blood into the civil service and it also has the advantage that it will come to be realized in Native society that birthright on its own will now no longer mean anything but that a good background must be coupled with qualifications if one is to be considered for high office. This will act as a stimulus to high-born and high-placed parents to educate their children as

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12 This indeed was the direction of reforms of the colonial bureaucracy being slowly undertaken at the time.

13 'W' buttons is a reference to the buttons on the uniform of a colonial official inscribed with the letter 'W', referring to Queen Wilhelmina.

well as possible. Apart from the 3 already mentioned, there are another three Regents with an H.B.S. education.[14]

In this way, gradually, the principle will be established: no one will be considered for the position of Regent who has not had an H.B.S. education and who is not a highly cultivated person and completely suitable for the position.

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That there is a desperate shortage of medical personnel in the Indies is well known. Officials and teachers could very well meet this need. At schools for Native Administrators and at teacher training schools, a new subject should be introduced; that of hygiene and first aid. Oh, how many lives could not have been saved had there only been someone in the neighbourhood who had had a basic knowledge of first aid. How often has it not been the case that someone has bled to death after being wounded before medical help, which was often miles away, could arrive.

A child was once run over by a train. The nearest doctor's surgery was 2 hours away, the child was brought there and bled to death on the way because there was no one who had any knowledge of first aid.

Native officials could in the interim pass on their knowledge of hygiene to village heads and then at least some information would be available in the village.

Teachers should teach their knowledge of hygiene at the school. In Magelang where a school for Native officials has been established and where there are also many health officers, a course in health and first aid could be established for such students immediately. An immediate beginning could also be made in Jogya where there is a teacher training school and there are also health officers.

In the training schools for Native officials and teachers, well-stocked libraries should be established, where possible, with books in 3 languages: Javanese, Malay and Dutch consisting of scholarly, educative books which sustain, enrich and elevate the mind. As far as possible a love of literature should be fostered amongst the students. And in order that reading is undertaken profitably, it should be under the direction of teachers who themselves have a love of literature. The literature that has been read should be regularly discussed. As far as possible a spirit of unrestrained discussion and debate should be fostered amongst the students. Discussion evenings could for instance be established under the direction of teachers at which important matters and events could be

[14] One of these was to become Kartini's husband.

discussed. The young students could then think over these matters and voice their opinions on a subsequent occasion.

They should then not be ridiculed if they express strange theories but assisted in developing their ideas with tact, gentleness and love. If one begins with ridicule then hearts will close, together with lips. They must be taught to think independently. As has already been said, teachers have a double task: to be educator and nurturer! They are responsible for a dual education: the intellectual and the moral!

A consciousness must be developed in the students 'that they have a moral duty to perform in society in the interests of the people who they will one day rule'. The relations formed at school amongst the students must be maintained even after they leave school. This could best be done by establishing a publication for students and ex-students of such schools, under the direction of teachers, assisted by the most advanced students. In such a publication, which would be in Dutch in order to maintain the language and also so that it could be read in Dutch circles, former students could report on their experiences in the civil service which could then be discussed by the teachers with the students and responded to.

The measure introduced by the Government in the last few years; to broaden the attitudes of teachers is most commendable. Each year during the long vacation a number of teachers are given the opportunity to visit at public expense, one of the three main cities about which they then have to prepare a report, preferably in Dutch, which is to be presented to the Inspector.

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As Native society develops and becomes more cultivated it will surely be necessary to establish new branches of service for the sons of the nobility.

In this regard it should be noted that there is already little interest amongst the youth who have completed the H.B.S. to serve in the State service.[15] The reasons for this are obvious: the freedom to do and think as they please which was possible while they were studying has taken root so thoroughly that there is little joy in contemplating employment where that freedom which they had come to appreciate is given scant regard.

The soul-destroying clerical job with which careers in the civil service always seem to have to begin is precisely not the way to inspire love for the civil service in the hearts of the newly-graduated H.B.S. student. The position he would get

[15] Kartini's brother Kartono was an obvious case in point but a younger brother had also given indication of this.

as a junior civil servant differs tremendously from his free Gymnasium days. Everything he has achieved through diligence, energy and much difficulty for five years he can lock away; he will need none of it for his new job. What dreams are not buried with a deep sigh when making the first stroke of a pen as a clerk!

And, not infrequently, the European fellow student of former days becomes his superior whom he has to approach on bended knee and show every respect that he, being of high birth, would only show his parents and older relations.

Energetic, intelligent Native youths should have the opportunity to continue their studies at a European High School. Native justices, for instance, would be of great service to the country. After having completed their studies at the High School they should be given the opportunity to continue their studies in the land of their birth and amongst the people whose language they speak. There they should be enabled to study Native law. They could uncover information that would be of great benefit to the Government and the country. As children of their people they can get access to everything, they could penetrate to the nether regions of the external and internal life of the people. They can go anywhere where a European would not have the slightest chance of going. And what no money on earth would entice people to tell a foreigner, the Native would entrust to a compatriot.

And as presidents of Regional Councils they would be an asset. They would not need an interpreter and could communicate directly with the accused. The ordinary people only speak one language, their own. The day has yet to come when courts will be conducted in the regional language, that is either in Javanese, Madurese or Sundanese! Why do chairmen of Regional Councils prefer Dutch-speaking jaksas? One can express oneself better in that language. But not all jaksas speak Dutch!

Native doctors trained in Europe would also provide a valuable service to our country. The advantage of being a child of the people oneself would constantly be apparent, particularly in undertaking investigations amongst the people and in other situations in which one has direct contact with the people. Being better qualified than the ordinary doctor-jawa, while thoroughly conversant in local language and conditions, Native doctors trained in Europe could provide invaluable service to medical science. They could thoroughly investigate Native medicine which is certainly not all quackery and could introduce it into the European world in a scientific formulation without which it would find no acceptance.

Natives use so many simple, safe medicines amongst which there are genuinely effective remedies. Should a lay person for instance tell a doctor that the Native successfully employs eel and worm blood for eye infection, he would be simply ridiculed by the expert. And yet it is a fact, and there are other such things. There are medical qualities in coconut milk and banana batu.

It is, after all, quite simple – the illnesses of the country should be cured by the medicines of that country. That there is a lot of superstition mixed up with this is not necessarily evidence that there is nothing of value in it.

There have been cases where patients (Europeans), especially those suffering from dysentery (a tropical disease) having been given up on by scientists, doctors, have found a cure in simple Native medicines.

Not so long ago a learned doctor diagnosed a girl with having advanced typhoid. He gave her at most two weeks to live and predicted a terrible end. The desperate mother took the girl away to her people to find a cure for her. The girl is still alive, is healthy and well, has no pain and is able to speak again. The learned doctors would shake their heads sadly if they knew what the child had been given: small insects caught in the sawah, swallowed live with a banana paste. A barbaric medicine – what does it matter? – she was cured as a result which would not have been the case with scientific medicine.

Doctor-jawa could make information such as this available. They could but they do not. No doubt this is because they fear that the learned doctors would ridicule them. A Native doctor just as qualified as his European colleague, convinced about something would dare to defend his conviction.

As engineer or as forester, energetic, intelligent Natives would be most suitable and could be of great benefit both to the Government and to the people!

Therefore the Netherlands should make it possible for the sons and daughters of Java to qualify themselves which would enable them to raise their people to a higher level of spiritual development and greater flowering – to the honour and glory of the Netherlands.

MEMORANDUM TO ACCOMPANY A PETITION FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO UNDERTAKE STUDIES, 19 APRIL 1903[1]

One can hardly open a single newspaper, a single periodical of any significance these days without reading something concerning the Indies, not only about the Indies as a rich country, but also about the Indies as the land of the Javanese, who has a right to the riches of his fatherland. That fact, as well as other things, convinces us that there is an earnest desire here in the Indies and in the Netherlands to improve the welfare, both in a material and spiritual sense, of the brown population of whom we are part.

How glad and thankful this wonderful development makes us, we, who love our people so dearly. We are not merely grateful on behalf of our people, but also for ourselves, because there is now some hope that our ideals may be realized, that the goal that we have been aiming for may be achieved.

There are many measures that cultivated and noble-minded people in the Indies and in the Netherlands have put forward for consideration to the Government as a means of promoting the welfare of the people of Java … Yet still we had been awaiting, still hoping and longing, for one which would speak to what lived and moved in our own hearts! That voice has now been heard. Oh, how moved we were when we heard the wonderful news: 'In the highest echelons of the Government attention has been given to the issue of the education of Native girls'!

We were full of jubilation, our hearts overflowed with joyful gratitude. So, it was not just an insanity of ours that for years we had carried around with us an Idea for which we had undertaken such a struggle.

A knowledgeable, highly placed Government official, whose opinion carried a lot of weight, had expressed the same Idea and was working towards its realization: 'the woman, as the carrier of civilization, also in the land of the sun'! The Javanese woman must be nurtured, must be educated, must partake in the gigantic work: 'the education of a population of millions.' This is the goal! This is the direction that must be taken if we are truly to establish something beautiful and permanent in Java which will be a blessing for the

[1] KITLV Archive, Inventory 13, H897: 32.

children of this land. Our society has such need of improved moral principles in the absence of which every regulation of the Government, however well intentioned, must fail or at best produce but meagre results.

How can we hope to cultivate productively if we do not first prepare the soil?

The best farmer would be unable to reap padi from a field that was not first prepared before being sown and planted. Similarly the cleverest builder would be unable to erect a building without foundations!

How, then, do we intend to raise the Javanese if we do not first improve the conditions of his formative years? The childhood of a person is unquestionably to be regarded as the foundation for his later life. And how is the Javanese brought up now?

As children, we were thoroughly imbued with the idea that the highest aim one could have in life was 'to be clever' and that this also meant to be good and noble; to be raised beyond the imperfections which affected the stupid and the ignorant. Alas! We soon learned that great intellectual development was by no means a guarantee for moral superiority! Oh, how this discovery pained us, we who had had so much respect for everything that was 'clever' and 'educated', all that was regarded as 'civilized'. Full of doubt we asked ourselves: 'if intellectuals can be so cruel, so heartless, so low, what then of the poor ignorant person, who can barely distinguish between good and evil?' And, automatically, the question posed itself: 'What is worse, to sin because of stupidity, ignorance, or to do evil things knowingly, premeditatedly?'

In the first throes of indignation, our immediate reaction was: 'Away with culture, if all it means is the outward covering-over of the faults which are then increased tenfold.' However, when we had somewhat recovered from our shock, calmly pondered about these things, we could not be satisfied with such a conclusion, we felt there had to be a better one. And we recognized that our opinion was unjust and superficial. There had to be a deeper reason for the phenomenon that had brought us into opposition with culture.

We had to know the reason, how it was possible that the best education did not consistently bear those fruits that could and should have been expected from it. We set for ourselves as our life's goal the task of finding the reason for this because, despite the shocks we experienced time after time from 'civilization', it was something we were greatly attached to, which we could not give up.

We searched and searched – we took notice of, felt and experienced the suffering of the many who suffered, and it became clearer and clearer, until finally it was obvious to us, scored into our brain and heart: 'schooling of itself

is not sufficient to form the person in terms of spiritual and moral improvement, the family environment had also to be educated.'

How did we arrive at that conclusion? Oh, it was so obvious and so near at hand! We saw the Javanese mothers raise their children, and that was the key to revealing to us the mystery with which we were faced. Or rather, one could not find a kinder mother than a Javanese mother in the entire world, but also not one who was weaker, less wise than Javanese mothers usually are. The 'slendang' method of childrearing is so perfectly designed to produce fretful, unmanageable children, the egotists and despots of the future. Or rather, no warmer or safer place exists for the child than against its mother's heart, but it is just there, at the source of life, that one must be on guard that the child does not imbibe with its life sustenance the seeds of the ruination of its character.

A Javanese mother cannot bear to see her child cry, she would rather indulge it, even when she realizes that it would not be in its best interests, than to see it grieve any longer. Is it really an exaggeration to say that in fact already on the first day of a child's life one must begin its education? Take a crying, squirming, red tot of not yet one week of age, which has no cause to cry, rock it to sleep in one's arms, and one will need to continue in this fashion: the child will constantly call you to undertake this service. And if, on occasion, one is unable to, what then? Who does one then make unhappy? Together with one's child, oneself!

That is what the Javanese mother cannot understand; her reasoning is: 'A child is a child, that is something one cannot and should not try to do anything about, other than to love and care for it. Therefore, one who allows a child to suffer, to cry, is cruel.'

Oh mothers, could you only realize that a tear in the eye of a child can later save your dear one and yourself rivers of the same. Give in to a child's bad temper and your authority over it is undermined forever. If the child is raised in this way, constantly indulged in such a fashion, the Mother will complain and sigh about the uncontrollability of her child over which she has no authority.

And then she commits other mistakes, she allows herself to become angry about the child's behaviour and punishes it with smacks. Smacks embitter but by no means always improve. It is hard, it is painful to hear a child abuse its mother, yes, even to see it hit her, which is by no means a rare occurrence in our world. Can we blame a child for this? Is it the child's fault? No, it is merely what its mother has made of it. Who taught it to be egotistical, selfish, who taught it to be revengeful?

If a child falls on the ground, or bumps into something, the Mother comforts the crying babe by sharply hitting the ground or the object on which it hurt

itself: the object is rebuked, abused, it is guilty, not the child. In this way the child learns that in the case of accidents it should look to others for the cause in the first instance; it learns to be hard, to seek revenge.

Complaints are made about idleness, especially amongst the Javanese nobility. Well, is it really so surprising when already as a little mite, barely able to walk, it sets up a cry if it is not addressed with the title to which it is entitled, and its mother expresses her joy that her child realizes so early in its life that it is not an ordinary being but a 'bendoro'? It is painful to see how the elderly crawl in the dust before infants which happen to have well-placed and high-born parent! What an elevating effect this must have on the childish spirit need hardly be said. It is worse than poison! And these are the people's rulers of the future!

Need one wonder any more that the children of today will demand respect with their fist when, in their opinion, the little people do not show them enough respect tomorrow? And is it in this fashion that one wants to obtain the truth from the mouths of the people, when fear of the questioner totally overwhelms the one being questioned? Oh, so often there arises from the very depths of our being, each time we are confronted by pitiful circumstances, when cries of physical and moral agony touch our conscience, this prayer, like a cry of desperation: 'Give the Javanese education!'

But, even if the Netherlands earnestly wanted to do so, to educate a population of 27 million all at once is an absolute impossibility. However, what would be possible is, in the meantime, to educate the upper layers of the population in such a way that they could be of benefit to those beneath them. The people worship their nobility, what emanates from the latter will readily find acceptance from the former. The Government, in fact, has realized this. But what benefit do the people receive from their highly respected nobility that the Government uses to rule them?

The nobility must be worthy of the people's deification of them. The Government must prepare them for this, and that is possible, that can happpen, as long as the nobility is given a wholesome education, one which is not exclusively based on intellectual development but one which also takes account of character formation.

Does it need to be made any clearer whose assistance must be sought for this important aspect of education, from whom the most help can be expected? Nature itself points to the woman for this important task.

On her lap the child learns for the first time to feel, to think, to speak, and this earliest nurturing is definitely not without significance for the rest of its life. And how can Javanese mothers bring up their children when they

themselves have not been educated? Can she be blamed that she ruins her child, the adult of the future, through weakness and ignorance? She knows no better, she has never seen or learned anything else!

Oh, for this reason we would ask, beg, plead of the Government and all those who have a heart for the Javanese: 'Give the Javanese woman – our girls – education. Develop them both in heart and mind, form them into fine, wise women, into decent nurturers of the coming generation.'

And when Java has its fine, wise mothers, the civilizing of a people will then be but a matter of time! When the thoughts that had once troubled the children's minds develop over time and take firmer shape, they become a conviction, and the firmer this becomes, the greater, the stronger, the more powerful becomes the initial vague desire for action, to bring into effect that which grew and agitated inside us, and which our heart and head told us was good!

Oh, how can one describe that initial feeling, when we first knew what we wanted, clearly and precisely saw before our eyes the 'Ideal' towards which our hearts had been unconsciously drawn! We wanted to work for our people, cooperate in their education, to raise them up to a higher, moral level in order to bring about better, more felicitous social conditions. We wanted to do useful work in a society which is so in need of a moral basis. How wonderful, beautiful was that 'Ideal' which shone and sparkled before us! We lost ourselves in the glow of its heavenly light! An overwhelming desire for action arose in us, and startled, we looked around us at the earthly surroundings into which we had descended, coming out of our dream and into reality.

Foolish things! What was it that we wanted? What was it that we could do? Poor, weak young girls, the two of us alone in the big wide world! Without support, without wealth! How would we ever bring our dreams into effect? It involves money, and that we do not have. Perhaps this could be arranged but how to overcome the opposition which awaited us from our own kin? We stood all alone, alone with our ideas in the midst of those who thought differently. We foresaw a difficult, frightening time, full of tumultuous inner struggles and concerns, many tears, much grief, if we were to remain kneeling at the altar of our souls' dearest desire.

How would we ever win our Mother to our side, she who was raised in a completely different world, one which was in direct opposition to ours? And Father, according to whose beliefs we were raised, who understood us and empathised with us, but who would nevertheless shudder at the thought of handing us over to the life which we yearned for. What father who loves his child would freely hand him or her over to a life so full of difficulty which of

necessity must be the lot of a pioneer, in whatever field? It was a great sacrifice that we asked of our beloved for the sake of our people; we asked for nothing less than to offer up to the future that which was most dear to them, a future which was certain not be easy.

To do battle against one's enemies can be difficult but it is child's play compared to battling against one's nearest and dearest. We had to be so circumspect, so careful in choosing the ways and means, for should we wound the one we were battling, we would but wound ourselves. Our only weapon was love, our strength, the belief in the goodness and pureness of what we wanted and were striving for.

Occasionally when, weary from the battle, we gave in to feelings of hopelessness, the question would arise in us, 'Why, what is it all for? It is easier just to allow life to drag you along, to see nothing, to hear nothing, to leave everything as it is.' But then we would hear or see something that would consume us with sympathy or indignation, and our sense of hopelessness would vanish along with the selfish longing for peace; fresh and lively new life would flow through our veins, an inner voice would call more loudly and more confidently: 'To work! Into battle on the side of the Good!'

It was a great moment in our lives when it was announced that official proposals had been put forward to provide education for Javanese girls! In moments of fear, when we doubted ourselves, and anxiously asked ourselves: 'Is our struggle of any use?' 'Will it ever lead to anything?' Then it was as if an invisible power came to support us, a mysterious voice whispering to us: 'Courage, help will come, perhaps through some miracle. Your struggle is just.' And lo and behold! Could we have ever dreamed that help would come from that direction?

Only then did the battle between the old ways and the new really begin in earnest: we recognized the path we needed to take to achieve our goal. A plan formed in our minds; we would turn to the Government, call on her help and support to realize our ideal. We would ask her to be allowed to be trained for our task at Government expense in Batavia and to put us in a position to be able to put into practice our ideas for preparing Javanese girls as the future educators of the next generation.

We presented our plans to our parents and what we had expected eventuated! They were opposed by our Mother, and Father experienced a difficult internal struggle. As one who shared our ideas he was in favour, but as Father he could not agree. Why did it have to be us who took on the difficult task? What we wanted to do was good, fine, noble, no one was more convinced of it than he was – but oh, it was such a heavy burden and that is what brought Father's heart into opposition.

But it was Father himself who had introduced these ideas into our hearts by the way he raised us. And now was Father to suppress that which he himself had cultivated and thereby destroy our life's joy? Because Father knew that our feelings and thoughts would be devastated if we could not live in and for the realization of those dreams.

The battle fought by parents and children was a heavy one … In the meantime new ideas came to us. Would not an education in Europe be better? Europe would broaden our perspective, would better prepare us for the work we wanted to undertake. Domestic economy is what our women desperately need to learn and this is what we could study in the training schools in the Netherlands. But before entering such a school one of us dearly wanted to go to a drawing academy. Later she would then be able to assist in the revival of our arts and crafts. And is that not also a means to foster the welfare of the people? If, after several months at a drawing academy, it would become apparent that she did not possess sufficient talent to progress very far in this field, then she would transfer to the domestic economy school in order to train in the area of hygiene, nursing and first aid, areas of knowledge which would be of such benefit for the Indies which has such a lack of medical aid. Many lives would not need to be lost unnecessarily were there someone at hand who had some knowledge of the basic principles of medicine or first aid.

How often in the case of someone being wounded, does the person not bleed to death before medical aid can be given. In our region a young girl was run over by a tram. The nearest doctor lived an hour by tram from where this happened. There was no one who had any knowledge of first aid; unbandaged, the unfortunate girl was taken to the doctor and before aid could be given, the poor thing had died from loss of blood. Also in the home, the knowledge of hygiene is essential; it is strange that almost no one thinks of instructing their children in this knowledge.

There is no one who, sooner or later, will not one day stand beside a sickbed, and then pity the person who knows nothing about nursing. There is nothing more wretched than to watch others suffer without being able to do anything to alleviate their suffering somewhat. We know this ourselves from experience, and it was at the sickbed of loved ones that the idea came to us and the plan evolved that, as soon as we had the opportunity, we would obtain the necessary knowledge of hygiene, etc. in order to pass this on to others.

After reconsideration we rejected our first idea, that is, we would ask the Government for assistance to undertake our training in the Indies as it seems

to us now that that would contribute far more to the success of our plans than to do so in Holland. Of what benefit would it be if our training was perfect in every detail but the success of the work overall was minimal?

The important thing is not to allow interest to wane and to begin immediately is better than waiting. The public for whose benefit we want to work does not yet know us and it would not be able to do so if we were to go away. If it did not know of us and we went to Europe, then on our return it would regard us as European women. And if people hesitate to give their daughters over to Europeans for their education then that would be even more so in the case of a Javanese woman who in their eyes had become European and for that reason would be despised.

Now that our parents have completely reconciled themselves with our plans and have given us their complete approval to devote ourselves to the intellectual and moral education of our women and the future, we would like the Government to give us the opportunity to train for the work we wish to undertake, now in Batavia: Roekmini to undertake training in drawing, medical care, nursing and first aid and needlework and Kartini in teaching (the assistant's certificate) and later when our training is completed, to open, either in Magelang or in Salatiga, a private school for daughters of Native administrators where we would hope according to our best efforts to turn them into fine, decent women, conscious of their moral vocation, prepared for their great role in society, to become beloved mothers, intelligent educators, efficient housewives, economists and loving helpers of all those who need help.[2]

In order to learn Dutch properly, which is of great importance for the education, instruction will be undertaken in that language; aside from teaching the elementary subjects, we would also give instruction in drawing, needlework, domestic science, administration, hygiene and first aid.

'The time for this has not yet arrived!', we hear many people tell us. Oh, really? Has the time not yet arrived to give Native young girls an education? The facts tell us differently.

At Government and private schools more and more girls are making use of the opportunities provided to partake of education. We see the wives of Regents receiving instruction from Dutch governesses together with their daughters. Somewhere in the interior of the Preanger region there is a private

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[2] Kartini mentions this possibility in a letter to EC Abendanon (27 January 1903). Both towns had substantial European inhabitants, Magelang as it was a major garrison town, Salatiga for its healthy mountain location. The school described here effectively defines the later concept of the Kartini School, the initiative of the Dutch Kartini Vereniging established in Kartini's name.

subsidized Dutch school especially for the children of the Native nobility which is attended by 20 girls, including girls from outside the region, and often the teacher has had to take boarders. Patihs and Wedonos send their children to Fröbel schools or Dutch courses. At our place the Patih has engaged a Dutch lady to teach his daughter.

Many more parents would have their daughters educated were there more opportunities to do so. There are not schools for girls everywhere, and most parents are against sending their daughters to mixed schools. In our neighbourhood there was a young mother who had her husband promise on her deathbed that as soon as he was somewhat better off, he would send their daughter to a Dutch school. Neither she nor her husband spoke Dutch but they realized that such an education could be an advantage.

An urge, a demand for advancement, can be perceived in almost every level of Native society. We must pay attention to these facts, to the aspirations of the Indies today, which is not the Indies of ten years ago, no, not even that of five years ago. What does it matter if now many parents do not send their children to school out of conviction but only because it is fashionable, in order not to be outdone by others, or only through imitation?

This does not change the fact that more and more parents are also wanting an education for their daughters. That is the direction we want to go in. And to prepare those who will provide that education, for the task of providing not just a thin veneer of culture, but to imbue them thoroughly with its essence.

We are morally obliged to lead those who entrust themselves to us in the right direction and to provide them with a noble example. We have spoken to many Native women about our ideas concerning education and nurturing the development of women and almost all of them asked: 'Where does such a school exist?' And the disappointment which was mirrored on their faces when they received the reply: 'Such a school does not yet exist, but it will one day.'

An old woman, very traditional, with whom we also spoke about such a school said to us, against all expectations, that she would also like to send her granddaughter there. And we asked her whether she did not mind that girls, her daughters would be so far from home. She said: 'Why? It will do them good to leave home. They will learn to be independent, here they depend too much on us – we cannot always be together and what will happen when they leave us, and have not yet learnt to be independent?' We were flabbergasted and at the same time so thankful. She hoped to live to see the day that her granddaughters would attend such a school.

Once we were speaking about the upbringing of children during their first years and what might result from it in later years. An elderly woman who

was in the company called out: 'Why did I not hear about such things in my youth?' And with some insistence she asked: 'Please, let me learn, send me to school. I was unable to raise my children properly, I would now like to be able to raise my grandchildren.' Recently we were speaking with a young Dutch-speaking Javanese girl; when she heard of our plans she said: 'Do carry them out, it will be of great benefit. When I visited relatives last year in Magelang, they urged me to stay there to teach their daughter Dutch and needlecraft. I did not accept because I am not trained to do that.'

Everything strengthens us in our hope and belief that all that is needed is for the first step to be taken and that then the rest will follow by itself!

May the Government be prepared to support our attempt to work for the benefit of our women of the future!

Kartini Roekmini

TO THE GOVERNMENT, AUGUST 1903[1]

First of all we respectfully offer our thanks to the Government which has once again demonstrated how much it takes the welfare of the people of this land to heart, showing itself ready to offer assistance when children of this nation expressed themselves, asking for the opportunity to be able to be of benefit to their compatriots.

Nevertheless, as a result of higher intervention, the assistance requested and offered, has now become unnecessary.

Now, by an entirely different pathway than that which we ourselves had defined, our dream can be realized directly in a way more beautiful than we had dreamed of.

What more could we have wished for in our efforts to be of benefit to others, than to find ourselves energetically supported by a strong, noble man who understands us, who shares our ideals and who has already demonstrated his credentials where we have yet to take our first step?

If parents might still hesitate to deliver their daughters to the care of two unmarried young women to be educated, that obstacle has been removed now that a married woman will take charge, and, moreover, now that this education will be undertaken in a kabupaten.

Already we have begun our work on a small scale in our home and the eagerness with which parents have made use of this opportunity to have their daughters learn more than just reading the Koran, fills our hearts with joy and dreams of the future.

Now that Kartini will shortly be married to the Regent of Rembang and will not be going to Batavia to study, Roekmini also no longer wishes to make use of the opportunity the Government has offered at the request of them both, to qualify herself in drawing, nursing and handiwork. She will not be allowed nor does she wish to go to Batavia on her own. She will now find another means to achieve her goal but in the meantime she has enough to do in running her small school.

We both respectfully present our sincerest thanks to the government for its good will.

Kartini Roekmini
Jepara 24-8-1903

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[1] This is from the collection of photocopies of Abendanon-related documents from Arsip Nasional in KITLV Archive No. H897 (35).

APPENDIX

Kartini's Library, 1899–1904

As the reader of her letters soon appreciates, much of Kartini's correspondence is taken up with discussions of prominent contemporary Dutch literature. This literature largely falls into two main categories, Dutch feminist literature, both fictional and polemic, and contemporary literary fiction, including international literature in Dutch translation. Interspersed are also references to and quotations from Dutch and English and other European classics in Dutch translation.

Kartini's frequent reference to what she has been reading can appear as 'name-dropping' and is certainly intended to be strategic. It was intended to demonstrate her 'up-to-date-ness', the orientation of her interest in, and her ability to intelligently read, serious European polemical and cultural works. It also provided an invitation for her European correspondents to engage with her in a serious discussion of them. It required them to recognize Kartini, and through her the Javanese, as equals. It also underpinned her credentials for being considered suitable for access to further education.

Kartini drew on these literary discussions to support the underlying feminist and political polemic that frames much of the correspondence as a whole and to develop her command of language. Her reading of a broad range of European literature also provided models for her own early prose – writing which included short stories, whose style conformed more to the conventional popular literary tastes of contemporary Dutch women's journals, and ethnographic writing that reflected the preoccupation of countless articles in the more learned journals of the day. Together, the analysis of her reading and writing provides sufficient evidence that she may have become an early modern Indonesian writer of note had she had lived.

Dutch literature of the *fin de siècle* saw a blossoming of a variety of literary styles and modern sociological preoccupations (Bel 1993). Inspired by the wider cultural, social and political changes occurring in society, Dutch authors reflected the 'new' by experimenting with a variety of literary forms such as naturalism, realism and idealism. The socialist and feminist movements in particular inspired a number of bestseller feminist *romans à clèf*, prominent amongst which were Cornélie Huygens' *Barthold Meryan* (1897) and Cecile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk's *Hilda van Suylenberg* (1897). These

were sensational bestsellers in the Netherlands portraying in literary form the more outspoken ideals of the feminist movement. Indicative of the 'new age' is the fact that these novels were available and eagerly read almost concurrently by Dutch women, and Kartini's reading of them demonstrates her contemporaneity.

The colony also had its influence on Dutch literature in contributing to it a distinct genre and 'mystical style' in which 'The East' became the central character. Foremost proponent of this genre was the productive Louis Couperus, who, Kartini notes, was in Java at the time. But there were other popular writers more engaged with 'the mysterious East', such as Henry Borel, or the English contemporary, Henry Fielding, whose fiction was tinged with Theosophical references and who wrote more positively of their fascination with the East.

Underpinning Dutch 'new writing' was the influence of the cultural movement, De Tachtigers, formed by a group of young writers who had emerged in the 1880s. By the end of the century works by these writers were considered to be Dutch classics and had a prominent place in Kartini's bookcase. As well as its output of fiction and poetry, the movement's key figures such as Frederik van Eeden and Carel Vosmaer continued to disseminate its ideals through the influential cultural journal, *De Nieuwe Gids*. Numerous references in Kartini's correspondence were to cultural debates that were canvassed in that journal, indicating that Kartini had regular access to it, probably by subscription.

Beyond these literary works, the feulliton section of colonial newspapers such as the Semarang daily, *De Locomotief*, and various colonial weeklies and minor periodicals, replicated these themes in minor key, finding fertile inspiration in subject material drawn from daily life in the tropical colonial society. In addition, the contemporary practice of writers such as Couperus, Augusta de Wit and Johanna de Woude, to serialize their work ensured that the newspaper formed a further important source for Kartini. A further source was what amounted to a mobile library, the leestrommel, by which subscribers could borrow for a fixed period a box of selected books and journals. It is clear however, that, whatever a reading of the 'opinion pieces' provided her, Kartini's passionate discussion of these books reflected her own appreciation of the books which spoke directly to her own condition.

Noticeably absent from her correspondence, however, is any reference to the then popular works by colonial (or former colonial) women writers such as Thérèse Höven, Annie Foore, and Melatie (NMC Sloot). These writers were all prolific in the 1890s and, while regarded as minor literary figures, were well liked by the metropolitan Dutch readers. Kartini makes no direct mention of

books published by her friend, Marie Ovink-Soer, but does mention to Rosa that one has been promised her. Marie had published two colony-based books, *In het Zonnenland* (In the Land of Sun) and *Vrouwenleven in de Desa* (Women's Lives in the Village) in 1899 and 1900, books that must have been written while she was entertaining Kartini.

Works by feminist writers formed by far the largest category of books Kartini cited and, although these literary references related to quite different cultural contexts, Kartini extracted from them universal arguments that she could relate to her own condition in Java. More immediate to Kartini's intellectual analysis of colonial life was the politically-centred literature that related directly to Java. Key here was the writing of Eduard Douwes Dekker under the pseudonym of Multatuli. His publications criticizing Dutch colonial administration and culture in the mid-nineteenth century which had created a sensation in the Netherlands at the time of writing, were being republished in collected popular editions at the end of the nineteenth century. They were being avidly read by the new generation of progressive colonial officials and a new generation of Javanese school students alike (Dolk 1993). Other political writing, including Henri van Kol's tract on the future of Java published under the pseudonym, Rienzi, the observations on contemporary colonial life by van Maurik and Borel and the infamous Bas Veth, represented immediate European observations of the contemporary colonial condition with which Kartini could directly engage.

What Kartini's library list demonstrates above all, then, is how up-to-date Kartini was. Not only was she keeping abreast of colonial affairs by a careful reading of the daily newspaper – amply demonstrated in the correspondence by reference to current events – she also acquired the books and articles she cites quite soon after their publication, or in the case of older 'classics' and translations, after their republication. In other words, Kartini was reading these manifestations of modern Western cultural expression simultaneously with her European contemporaries and, in as far as much of this was no doubt by-passed by a majority of the largely conservative religious Dutch community, and the overwhelming majority of 'non-readers' who constituted colonial European society, her reading was well in advance of large sections of a Dutch and European colonial society.

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Kartini's Library, 1899–1904

The following list of authors and titles of books, articles and periodicals referred to in the correspondence is arranged by the year and the order in which they are mentioned. Dutch titles have been translated or, where relevant, original published English language titles have been indicated.

1899

Goekoop-De Jong van Beek en Donk, Cecile (1866–1944)

Hilda van Suylenburg, 1897.

This provocative bestselling feminist novel described the situation of women in contemporary Netherlands experienced by the book's heroine, Hilda, as revealed through her acquaintance with an idealist female doctor and social worker. Hilda decides to become a lawyer to change laws discriminating against women but also to marry and bear children.

Nationale Tentoonstelling voor Vrouwenarbeid, Congres Report

Maatschappelijk Werk in Indië, 1898. (Community Work in the Indies.)

A report produced by the National Exhibition of Women's Work on the role of women in community work amongst the European community in the colony.

Multatuli (E Douwes Dekker) (1820–1887)

Max Havelaar, 1859.

Wijs Mij de Plaats Waar Gij Gezaaid Hebt, 1861. (Show Me the Place Where I Have Sown.)

Max Havelaar and other works by this mid-nineteenth-century writer critically described colonial policy and practice and called for colonial reform. His works were being re-issued between 1890 and 1910.

Justus van Maurik (1846–1904)

Indrukken van een Totok, 1897. (Impressions of a Newcomer.)

A popular writer of 'comical' novels, this work was a prominent example of many contemporary accounts and impressions of the Indies.

Johanna van Woude (1853–1904) (pseudonym of Sophie van Wermeskerken-Junius)

Editor of *De Hollandsche Lelie* (The Dutch Lily) from 1887, and a popular author and recognized writer.

1900

Cornelie Huygens (1848–1902)

Barthold Meryan, 1897.

The book, the work of a socialist feminist writer, was a bestselling fictional portrayal of socialist feminist ideals. It describes the transformation of the central male figure from a capitalist family who becomes a committed socialist. It advocated open marriage and the emancipation of women. Huygens was the first female member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party.

Jeanette van Riemsdijk (née Kikkert) (1861–1931)

Moderne Vrouwen, 1899. (Modern Women.)

Martine Tonnet

'De Wayang Orang in Jogyakarta' *De Gids*, 24–27 Juni 1899.

Tonnet was an archaeologist, writing numerous influential articles on Java's classical temples.

Multatuli (E Douwes Dekker) (1820–1887)

Minnebrieven, 1861. (Love Letters.)

Louis Couperus (1863–1923)

Kartini refers to his forthcoming book, *De Stille Kracht*, written while in Java living with a relative.

Hélène Mercier (1839–1910)

Verbonden Schakels, 1889. (Linked Shackles.)

A social-liberal feminist writer espousing the equality of men and women. She was an early advocate of women's education, particularly in domestic economy, and women's role in social work. She was an active social worker and published widely on a range of social issues. Kartini was evidently deeply influenced by her writing and transcribed a page from this book.

Johanna van Woude (Sophie van Wermeskerken-Junius)

Een Hollandsche Binnenhuisje, 1895. (A Dutch Interior.)

This, her most popular work, was serialized in *De Hollandsche Lelie*.

Anna de Savornin Lohman (1868–1930)

Het Eenige Noodige, 1897. (The Only Necessary.)

She was the spokesperson for the conservative Christian wing of the Dutch women's movement advocating the importance and sanctity of marriage.

Henri Borel (1869–1933)

Het Jongetje, 1899. (The Little Boy.)

A popular writer and theosophist with a particular interest in Chinese cultural traditions. He was a colonial official for Chinese relations in Netherlands Indies.

Servaas de Bruin (1821–1901)

Historisch en Geographisch Woordenboek, 1862–1869. (Historical and Geographical Dictionary.)

This was a widely used encyclopedia of 'useful knowledge'.

PA de Genestet (1829–1861)

A popular mid-nineteenth-century Dutch poet whose collected works were regularly reprinted.

Augusta de Wit (1864–1939)

Orpheus in de Desa. (Orpheus in the Desa.)

Although not published as a book until 1903, this first appeared earlier in serialized form.

Jeltje de Bosch Kemper (1836–1916)

An important Dutch feminist referred to by name only.

Bas Veth (1860–1922)

Het Leven in Nederlandsch-Indië, 1900. (Life in the Netherlands Indies.)

This was a sensational (negative) exposé of colonial life critical of miscegenation.

Journals:

De Gids (The Guide) The leading Dutch cultural journal

Wetenschappelijke Bladen (Scientific Papers) Periodical for disseminating recent discoveries and ideas.

De Hollandsche Lelie (The Dutch Lily). A popular young women's journal.

1901

Edna Lyall (pseudonym of Ada Ellen Bayly) (1857–1903)

Wij Beiden. (Translation of *We Two,* 1884.)

The book was based on the life of social reformer Charles Bradlaugh.

Harold Fielding (1859–1917)

De Ziel van de Mens. (Translation of *The Soul of a People*, 1897.)

The author was a British orientalist with a particular interest in Buddhism especially in Burma.

Mrs (Mary) Humphry Ward (1851–1920)

Marcella (Dutch translation of *Marcella*, 1884).

An English liberal feminist writer who was born in Australia.

Marie Metz-Koning (1864–1926)

Het Viooltje dat Weten Wilde, 1900. (The Little Violet Who Wanted to Know.)

A collection of her works was published in 1900.

Lewis Wallace (1827–1905)

Ben Hur (Dutch translation of *Ben Hur, a Tale of the Christ*, 1880).

Multatuli

Bloemlezing, 1876. (Selected Extracts.)

School voor Hoofden (=*Vorstenschool*, 1875). (School for Chiefs.)

Further references to this influential writer on mid nineteenth century colonial conditions whose works were republished in numerous editions in the 1890s.

Carmen Sylva (pseudonym of Elizabeth, Queen of Romania) (1843–1916)

Deficit. (Dutch translation of *Defizit*, 1890.)

JJ Cremer (1827–1880)

De Lelie van 's-Gravenhage, 1851. (The Lily of 's-Gravenhage [The Hague].)

Toneelspelers, 1876. (Actors.)

A popular Dutch writer and dramatist.

Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932)

De Kleine Johannes, 1885. (The Young Johannes.)

Van Eeden was founding member and key writer of the Tachtiger movement and best known for this novel.

Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914)

De Wapens Neergelegd, 1900 (Dutch translation of *Die Waffen nieder!*, 1889). (Lay Down your Arms.)

A prolific German writer, feminist and pacifist. Renowned as first female recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Henri Borel (1869–1933)

De Laatste Incarnatie, 1901. (The Last Incarnation.)

Droom uit Tosari, 1899. (Dream from Tosari.)

Further references to this popular writer.

Felix Louis Ortt (1866–1959)

Naar de Groote Licht, 1899. (Towards the Great Light.)

Ortt became well known as Christian anarchist, peace activist spiritualist and feminist.

Riënzi (pseudonym of Henri van Kol)

Land en Volk van Java, 1896. (Land and People of Java.)

This was van Kol's proposals for colonial reform written prior to becoming a member of parliament.

Multatuli (E Douwes Dekker) (1820–1887)

Het Gebed van de Ontwetende, 1861. (The Prayer of the Innocent.)
Thugater, 1861. An episode from *Minnebrieven* (see above).

Israel Zangwill (1864–1926)

Dromers van het Ghetto, 1898. (Dutch translation of *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People*, 1892.)

Influential English Jewish writer and promoter of women's suffrage.

Prévost, Marcel (1862–1941)

Moderne Maagden, 1900. (Translation of *Les Demi-Vierges*, 1894.) (Modern Maidens.)

This was a critical account of the impact of education on girls in Paris.

1902

Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940)

Gösta Berlings. (Dutch translation of *Gösta Berlings Saga*, 1891.)

A Swedish writer, best known for writing children's books, this was her first publication. In 1909 awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922)

A reference only to this Indian Christian Socialist.

Nellie van Kol

Van de Reis Mee Thuisgebracht: Vertouwleijk Gekeuvel met Grootere Kinderen, 1902. (What I Brought Back with Me: Intimate Chats with Older Children.)

Part of Nellie van Kol's educational publications for children.

Fritz Reuter (1810–1874)

German poet and writer.

Louis Couperus (1863–1923)

De Stille Kracht, 1900. (The Hidden Force.)

Carel Vosmaer 1826–1888

De Inwijding. (The Induction.)

A poet and novelist and a leading literary figure in the Tachtiger movement.

1903

EJ Potgieter (1808–1875)
Reference only to this famous Dutch poet.

Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916)
Quo Vadis. (Dutch translation of *Quo Vadis*, 1895.)

Edna Lyall (pseudonym of Ada Ellen Bayley) (1857–1903)
See above.

Israel Zangwill (1864–1926)
See above.

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Appended to Kartini's letter of 3 November 1903 is a list of authors. It is not made clear whether these are authors of books Kartini already owned and was taking to Rembang or those she still wished to have and was asking for.

Pierre Henri Ritter (1851–1912)
Paedagogische Fragmenten, 1888/1900. (Pedagogic Fragments.)
Ethische Fragmenten, 1891. (Ethical Fragments.)
Popular Dutch author.

Carel Vosmaer (1826–1888)
Amazone, 1880. (Amazon.)
Inwijding. (Induction.)
Leading Dutch poet, writer and literary figure.

Jonathan (Pseudonym of Johannes Petrus Hasebroek) (1795–1896)
Waarheid en Droomen (Truth and Dreams), 1840 (many reissues).
Well-known conservative (religious) Dutch poet and writer.

PAS van Limburg Brouwer (1829–1873)
Akbar: Een Oostersche Roman, 1872. (Akbar: An Oriental Romance.)
A scholar of Hindu cultural and religion in East Indies. *Akbar* became a popular novel.

Jacques Perk (1859–1881)

Gedichten (Poems).

Significant Dutch poet and member of Tachtiger literary movement and *De (Nieuwe) Gids*.

Robert Hamerling (1830–1889)

Aspasia (Dutch translation of *Aspasia: Eine Künstler- und Liebesroman aus Alt-Hellas*, 1876.) (Aspasia: A Romance of Art and Love in Ancient Hellas.)

Significant Austrian poet.

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949)

Wijsheid en Levenslot. (Translation of: *La Sagesse et la Destinée*, 1898.) (Wisdom and Destiny.)

A Belgian mystic, dramatist, writer and poet.

Leo Tolstoy (1928–1910)

Opstanding (Dutch translation of *Resurrection*, 1899).

Tolstoy's last major work on the injustice of man-made laws and the hypocrisy of institutionalized religion.

Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846)

Frithiof's Saga (1825).

Famous Swedish poet and writer. The saga was widely translated.

Samuel Smiles (1812–1904)

Plicht. (Translation of *Duty*, 1880, a collection of essays.)

Author of a number of similar self-improvement books.

George Egerton (pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright) (1859–1945)

Grondtonen (Dutch translation of *Keynotes*, 1893).

Australian-born writer.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861)

Aurora Leigh (Dutch translation of *Aurora Leigh*, 1856).

English feminist writer.

Mrs (Mary) Humphry Ward (1851–1920)
Robert Elsemere (Dutch translation of *Robert Elsemere*, 1888).

George Eliot (1819–1880)
Adam Bede (Dutch translation of *Adam Bede,* 1859).
English feminist writer.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)
Idyllen van den Koning (Dutch translation of *Idles of the King*, 1856–1885).
English poet.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)
Het Licht dat Verging (Dutch translation of *The Light That Failed*, 1890).
English novelist.

Beatrice Harraden (1864–1936)
Voorbijgaande Schepen in een Donkere Nacht (Dutch Translation of *Ships That Pass in the Night*, 1893).
English feminist writer.

1904

Elsevier Maandschrift. (Cultural periodical, *Elsevier.*)

GLOSSARY

Words listed are Indonesian (modern spelling) unless otherwise indicated: J = Javanese; D = Dutch.

A

adat	tradition, lore
adipati	official title for regent
air belanda	soda water
akal	shrewd, intelligent
alun-alun	large square in front of palace or residence of regent
ambalo	type of wood
ampun (J)	forgiveness
aneh	strange
aren	sugar palm
aspirant (controleur) (D)	lowest ranking European colonial official
assem	tamarind

B

baatje	item of clothing
babu	house servant (colonial term)
banjir	flood
bantal	cushion
barang	luggage
bedak	face powder
bekakas	tools, implements
Bemi(e)	nickname for Roekmini
bendoro	term of address for noblewomen
bendy/bendie	two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle
Bik Mi	nickname for Roekmini
Binnenhof (D)	Dutch royal court
Binnenlands Bestuur (D)	the colonial (lit: Inland) administration
blanda(s) (belanda)	Dutchman, European
bocah (boca) angon	boy tending buffalo

bouw (D) land measurement, approx. 2500 square meters
broomkalie (D) a bromide, taken to reduce anxiety
bupati regent, highest ranking Javanese official (see also regent)

C

caping farmer's cone-shaped hat
cepaka fragrant flower
controleur (D) junior colonial official
Cuwik nickname for Kardinah

D

desa village
Djiwa (jiwa) spirit, soul
doktor-jawa Western trained Javanese doctor
dos-a-dos large horse-drawn carriage
dringin silk cloth, of various patterns
dukun mystic, traditional healer
dunia world
dupa incense

E

el (D) yard measure
ethici (D) supporter of an ethical colonial policy

F

freule (D) term of address for young noblewomen

G

gamelan Javanese orchestra
garuda mythical bird resembling eagle
garwa ampil (J) secondary co-wife of regent
gedachten (D) thoughts
glepong lawar meat or fish dish
guling bolster
guna guna black magic
gusti aristocratic title
Gymnasium (D) academic secondary school

H

H.B.S. (D) Hogere Burger School, grammar school
Heer (de) (D) Mister
homber (*see* omber)

I

ibu mother
ilmu science, knowledge
inju fibre

J

jaksa Javanese justice official
jati teak
jimat talisman
Juffrouw (D) Miss

K

kabar news, information
kabupaten residence of bupati (regent), regency
kacip scissors for use with areca nut
kacong boy, houseboy
kain material
kain sogan best quality cloth
kaki(es) feet
kali river
Kalong (keluang) fruit bat, nickname for Abendanon family
kampong town quarter, village
kangen longing for, homesick
Kangjeng respectful form of address for men and women of high social status
kapel-perang warship
karang coral
karbouw water buffalo
kasian pity, sympathy
kebaya item of women's clothing
Kebon Sirih residential district of Batavia
kedaton palace
kemuning tree producing yellow wood

kenanga	oil producing flowering shrub
kendi	earthenware flask
klaverbond	cloverleaf
Kleintje	Little One
Koja	Muslim trader, Moor
kokki	cook
koolblanda	decorative tree with white leaves
konde	Javanese woman's hair arrangement
kota	town, city
kromo	ordinary Javanese people
kris	Javanese dagger with mystical and ceremonial significance
kucing	cat
kuda kore	wild horse
kwade	canopy (wedding ceremony)

L

Landraad (D)	District Court
Lebaran	celebration of end of fasting month
leestrommel (D)	box of (Dutch language) reading material
lulur	herbal cosmetic
lurah	village head

M

magang	apprentice clerk
mama	Kartini's stepmother, RA Moerjam
mandi	bathroom
mantri	lower official
melati	perfumed flower
mandur	foreman
mejuffrouw (D)	Miss
mevrouw (D)	Mrs
mijnheer (D)	Mr
moeder (tje) (D)	mother
moedertjemijn, moeske, moeke	variants of 'mother' as term of endearment
muiltjes	slippers

N

nenek old women
ngoko familiar, everyday Javanese speech level
Ni nickname for Kartini
Nonna(s) Eurasian woman
nonya (nyonya) married woman

O words

obat medicine
omber card game
oom (D) uncle, term of address for familiar older male (European)
oudjes (D) old ones, parents

P

paal (D) 1506.94 metres
pacar-pacar collection of ritual dishes etc
pace mengkudu tree and fruit
padi field rice
padmi official, first wife of regent
pakian clothes
Paku Alam princely royal house of Yogyakarta
pala mace
Pangeran honorific for Javanese ruler
pangulu senior mosque official
pantes (pantas) proper
pantun traditional form of Javanese verse
pasangrahan travellers' lodge
pasar (pasar Malay) market (rough language)
paseban reception room
passepartout (D) photograph frame
patih Javanese official below regent
payung (ceremonial) sunshade
pendopo gallery, in front of important Javanese residence for receiving visitors
penghulu Muslim leader, scholar
peperhuisje (D) (usually) small paper bag – here metal container
perlu necessary

pinang	areca nut
pisang	banana
plangi (pelangi)	colourful cloth
prauw	small indigenous boat
priyayi	nobility, Javanese civil service
Puasa	fasting month
Pulu Kapok	dreamland
putri	woman

R

Raden Ajeng	unmarried woman of noble birth
Raden Ayu	married woman of noble birth
Raden Mas	male of noble birth
randu	capok tree
rasamala	tree with fragrant wood
Ratu	Queen
Regent (D/E)	highest Javanese official (see also bupati)
rijsttafel (D)	rice based meal with numerous accompanying dishes which became a signature item in Dutch colonial cuisine
ronggeng	dancer
rujak	fruit salad

S

sakit (h)ati	resentful
salat istica	blessing
sampiran	clothes hoist
santri	student at Islamic religious school, strict Muslim
sapu injuk	broom (of tree fibre)
sarong	traditional item of clothing
saudara	sister
sawah	rice field
sebrit	small bowl on a base
selamatan (slamatan)	ceremonial meal
selendang	strip of material worn by women across one shoulder (for carrying)
selir	secondary wife, not the official consort of the bupati
sembah	respectful greeting, formal gesture of politeness

sembayang istica	blessing
sinjo	Eurasian male
Sinterklaas (D)	St Nicholas Day – 6 December
sirih	betel
sobat	friend
sono	kind of wood
sorties (D)	a light sleeveless women's jacket
spada	Eurasian (derogatory)
Sunan	title of ruler of Surakarta
Susuhunan	(*see* Sunan)

T words

tabeh	informal greeting
tandakkan	dancing
terong	eggplant
terong blanda	type of fruit
tidak boleh	not allowed
tiga	three
tinka(s)	whim, caprice
Toraja	here, inhabitants of Central Sulawesi
trinil	small bird, nickname for Kartini
tuan (besar)	(very) important person, European
tuan aspirant	mister junior controleur
tukang	skilled worker

U

ular weling	type of venomous snake

W

W. buttons / Wilhelmina buttons	Buttons on the uniform of a colonial official carrying the letter 'W' referring to Queen Wilhelmina as head of state
wali	legal guardian, someone acting in a position
waru	kind of tree
wasiat	magic
wayang	Javanese shadow puppet play
wayang orang	Javanese play with actors
wedono	Javanese head of district

Wi(k) (*see* Cuwik)
widodori (J) angel

Y

yu (J) sister

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KARTINI

The Complete Writings 1898–1904

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY JOOST COTÉ

IN INDONESIA, the legacy of Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904) is celebrated on Kartini Day, 21 April, every year. Around the world Kartini is recognised as a major figure in the history of the advancement of women, a tireless and effective advocate of women's education and emancipation. However, this is the first complete and unexpurgated collection of Kartini's published articles, memoranda and correspondence ever published in any language.

This collection reveals Kartini's importance as a pioneer of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Claiming in her letters and petitions her people's right to national autonomy well before her male compatriots did so publicly, Kartini used her writing in an attempt to educate the Netherlands and Dutch colonialists about Java and the aspirations of its people. Had she lived longer, she would have been one of Indonesia's leading pre-independence writers as well as an educationalist. In 1964 she was elevated to the status of national hero by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. She has become one of the most well known Asian figures in the international women's movement.

The product of several decades' study and based on archival sources, *Kartini* is extensively annotated and provided with an authoritative historical introduction by one of the world's leading Kartini authorities. This work will be the essential resource for scholars and students of Kartini and her place in Indonesian history, around the world, for many years to come.

Dr Joost Coté is Senior Research Fellow in the Department of History at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He has researched and published widely on early 20th century colonial modernity in the Netherlands East Indies and has written about Kartini over several decades. He has previously published three translated and annotated collections of correspondence by Kartini and her sisters.

ISBN 978-1-922235-10-7

MONASH University Publishing

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